

WILLIAM ASHBY

**TALES
WITHOUT
HATE**

William M. Ashby

... is a keen observer as well as an active advocate and participant. He has an ear for language and succeeds in vividly conveying significant experiences from the perspective of an intelligent black youth growing up in the early days of the century and that of a well-educated professional dealing with urgent problems of jobs, housing, education and health during the First World War, the great migrations of the '20s, the depression of the '30s, the Second World War and beyond.

*—Alexander J. Allen, Vice President,
National Urban League*

William Ashby is a remarkable human being, and this is a remarkable book. He was directly involved in many of the struggles for racial justice in Newark since before World War I, and he has written a uniquely warm and fascinating chronicle of the black experience in our city. Anyone who wants to understand the human side of urban development in this century will want to read this book.

*—Donald T. Dust, Chairman,
Newark Preservation and
Landmarks Committee*



WILLIAM M. ASHBY

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TALES
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HATE

Introduction by

DR. CLEMENT ALEXANDER PRICE
Rutgers University

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NEWARK PRESERVATION AND
LANDMARKS COMMITTEE
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by
William M. Ashby

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I do not hate anyone . . . To hate anyone, one must generate in himself a degree of mental and emotional animosity. Why should I make myself miserable by always being mad at somebody?

— William M. Ashby

PREFACE

This is the first book to be published by the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee. I cannot think of any book that we could present with more pride — or with more pleasure.

In addition to all the accomplishments recorded elsewhere in this book, William M. Ashby has also been a founder and very active officer of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee. Since the first meeting that led to formation of this organization in 1973, he has been a vigorous participant in our efforts to save and celebrate the best of Newark's past. His faithful and forceful commitment to this cause has often lifted the spirits and strengthened the determination of our members and friends.

Mr. Ashby's involvement in landmark preservation began when he was well into his 80s. But — as readers of this remarkable book will soon discover — his involvement was consistent with the many previous years of his life: He saw a need in his community and he responded to it, with no regard for personal gain. We in the committee have come to esteem Mr.

Ashby as a matchless teacher of history — he has seen, after all, nearly half of this nation's two centuries — and as a kind of living landmark in the development of modern Newark.

Long before most of us were born — and certainly long before it was popular or even safe — he was campaigning for social justice and racial equality. It is doubtful that anyone still alive has been involved longer, or more deeply, in the often arduous growth of Newark's black community. He has not only seen and participated in noteworthy events, but he is able to recreate them with all the skills of a first-rate raconteur. Readers will find in these "Tales Without Hate" an extraordinary blend of wisdom and wit, drama and amusement, information and inspiration.

We are most grateful to Mr. Ashby for sharing this unique work with us, and giving our committee the honor of bringing all of it before the public. This is the realization of a longtime dream for Mr. Ashby, who wrote most of these tales during the late 1960s. He originally entitled his manuscript "Some Unimportant Incidents in the Life of an Unimportant Man Who Is Eighty and Still Alive," and circulated it to various publications. Excerpts first appeared in print in 1970, when The Newark Sunday News ran a 10-part series of sections of the text, and the Yale Alumni Magazine published the chapters dealing with that institution. Later, in October 1979, the Newark Public Information Office printed some of the tales in a special newspaper section marking Mr. Ashby's 90th birthday.

Meanwhile, however, our committee had resolved to do what we could to publish the entire manuscript. We have been most fortunate to receive vital assistance from many people in achieving this goal.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support given to this project by the Victoria Foundation, the New Jersey Bell Telephone Co., and the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce. Their grants have covered the costs of composition and printing. We note that the Victoria Foundation has long assisted the Urban League and other community projects, but has seldom sponsored publications. But its executive officer, Howard Quirk, told us he and his board members were so impressed with the parts of the manuscript they had seen that they decided to make an exception this one time.

We also express appreciation to Douglas Eldridge for donating his services as editor of this book. Mr. Eldridge came to know

Mr. Ashby and wrote several articles about him while he was a reporter for The Newark News. He is now assistant director of the Newark Public Information Office, a unit in Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson's office. Several other staff members of that agency have been most helpful. Kathleen Suarez set all the type in this book, with great precision and speed. Roberta Crane and Albert Jeffries provided a variety of photographs, and Richard Hamilton drew the portrait which serves as the frontispiece.

We owe spécial thanks to Dr. Clement Alexander Price, chairman of the Black Studies Department at Rutgers University in Newark, and a leading authority on black history in New Jersey. He contributed an insightful introduction which helps us understand the significance of Mr. Ashby's experiences and observations in the context of 20th century race relations. Dr. Price's own book, "Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey," was published recently by the New Jersey Historical Society.

We also are very grateful to the tireless Charles Cummings, supervisor of the New Jersey Reference Division of the Newark Public Library, and members of his staff. They helped us obtain rare photographs from the library collection so that readers can see some of the people and places described by Mr. Ashby.

Finally, I want to express my personal appreciation to the officers, members and staff of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee for their ready support of this project. And I want to acknowledge the pledges of cooperation in promoting and distributing this book that we have received from the National Urban League and the Newark Public Library.

Our last thanks, like our first, must go to William Ashby — and to his ever gracious wife, Mary, who has sustained him through countless civic endeavors and has obviously been a major source of inspiration for this book. We thank Mr. Ashby for giving us — and the people of our community — this singular piece of history and literature. And we thank him for being every bit as generous, honest, zestful and humane in his writing as he has been in his very long and productive life.

Donald T. Dust, Chairman,
Newark Preservation and
Landmarks Committee

December 1980

INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM M. ASHBY: RENAISSANCE MAN

by

CLEMENT ALEXANDER PRICE

Department of History
Rutgers University
Newark, New Jersey

William M. Ashby has fought for racial justice in the United States for more than 60 years and is undoubtedly New Jersey's most seasoned veteran of the struggle for equality. His career as a social worker began as the Age of Booker T. Washington closed; it lasted through the years of unrealized hopes during the New Negro Era and the beginnings of the modern civil rights movement in the 1950s.

The historical community and those attempting to rebuild urban America are indeed fortunate that over his long career Ashby's memory remained so precise and that he has recorded the following accounts. The publication of his memoirs is of considerable importance to our times because he contributes much to our understanding of racial problems in New Jersey society, and because through his writings we learn of the triumph of a remarkable 20th Century black man.

Born on October 15, 1889, in York County, Virginia, the son of free-born blacks who owned property in the cradle of Anglo-American civilization, Ashby spent much of his boyhood in Newport News, Virginia. Late 19th Century Newport News, like most southern cities, was marked by the stark reality of racial intolerance. Blacks there were relegated to the dark

underside of local society. At a young age Ashby saw a black man, the anonymous victim of a lynching, hanging from a sycamore tree. It was a horrid sight which he recalls in vivid and frightening detail.

Ashby later migrated to Roselle, New Jersey, and worked as a delivery boy at R. H. Allen, a catering establishment in Newark. In 1905 he entered Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania, from which he was graduated in 1911. In 1916 he received an S.T.B. degree in social work from Yale University.

Ashby's pursuit of higher education marked him as a member of the Talented Tenth, that small but significant group of promising young blacks challenged by W.E.B. DuBois to greatness. DuBois called on this group to use their knowledge to uplift the black masses. From them he called for an affirmation of racial identity and a commitment to black uplift:

"First, you are Negroes, members of that dark, historic race that from the world's dawn has slept to hear the trumpet summons sound through our ears. Cherish unwavering faith in the blood of your fathers, and make sure this last triumph of humanity."

Young Ashby heeded these words. He became an advocate of social change after he heard Eugene Debs speak in Newark; in 1915 he published a novel, "Redder Blood," which was an early fictional exploration into the problem of miscegenation in the United States. His memoirs also reveal an interest in philosophy, science, and religion.

But the amelioration of race relations in the nation more powerfully attracted Ashby's interest and led him to a career with the National Urban League's local chapters in Newark, New Jersey; Springfield, Illinois, and Elizabeth, New Jersey.

A year after he was graduated from Yale, he returned to Newark. At that time New Jersey's largest municipality was settling an increasing number of southern black migrants. Most of them were forced by their poverty and the racial antipathy of the white population to live in the city's infamous Third Ward, an area to which Eastern and Southern European immigrants had been banished for nearly two generations. While life had always been difficult for Third Ward residents, conditions became more deplorable as blacks made the area their home.

Before the Newark Urban League was established in 1917, black reformers sought to improve the social conditions of the small black community. These efforts, however, despite their

sincerity, were insufficient to overcome the extraordinary barriers to black uplift. As Ashby shows, white Newarkers sensitive to the plight of black migrants were numerically small. Most industries and businesses in Newark refused to employ blacks; those which accepted black laborers usually placed them in the unenviable, menial occupations. The World War I years, nonetheless, encouraged a greater number of southern blacks to migrate to New Jersey in search of jobs in war-related industries.

They came hoping to find a greater measure of opportunities in housing, education, and political expression; they came, as Ashby has observed, "in the deep of the winter in the thin cotton dresses worn in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama or Florida." Against the background of their unfulfilled hopes, the Negro Welfare League (later the Essex County Urban League) was formed on January 8, 1917, by two ministers, one black and the other white. Ashby was selected as the agency's first executive secretary.

Ashby's accounts of his many experiences in the National Urban League from 1917 to 1953 are in themselves valuable additions to the already rich literature in Afro-American autobiography and history. They are all the more significant because of what we learn about the advocacy style of black leaders in urban America before the modern civil rights movement in the 1950s and beyond. He became the executive director of the National Urban League's Newark office at a time when the black population there and in other New Jersey cities suffered badly from the poverty, ignorance, and disorganization fostered by generations of racial exploitation in the South. His was a formidable challenge. Progress for blacks would have to be made without the benefit of articulate black political leaders — and that was in a city and state where historically blacks had been a despised underclass, and at a time of extreme racial tensions nationally.

As a black community leader, Ashby conformed to a style found in other cities during the early 20th Century. From the turn of the century to the Great Depression black poverty and political weakness forced black leaders to seek an improvement in race relations and economic conditions through prudent contacts with sympathetic whites. Theirs was a generation of high ideals, yet without the clout to make great things happen. In Ashby's career contemporary obstacles to racial uplift were not always insurmountable. His memoirs provide several accounts

in which his dogged determination, his ability to nurture seemingly genuine friendships with influential whites, his charm, and his utilization of two important American qualities — idealism and hope — turned the tide ever so slightly in favor of the blacks he served.

Black workers, then, were hired in local factories not only because their labor was needed, but also because Ashby dramatized the fairness of their employment to reluctant employers. In keeping with the first generation of National Urban League officials, he was a spokesman for the black community, articulating to powerful whites the interests of blacks without jobs, without much hope.

Ashby's memoirs also contribute to our understanding of race relations, especially in New Jersey, a state that historians of the black experience have ignored for too long. In New Jersey, which between the two world wars settled more blacks than any other northeastern state, white racism was found in both overt and polite forms. It acquired the worst characteristics of southern racial customs, with the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan between World War I and the Depression, and segregation and violence against defenseless blacks in industrial cities. Black residents, however, also encountered white paternalism from reformers in social service agencies.

Ashby writes with considerable insight and compassion of his efforts to transcend these obstacles. He provides the most reliable autobiographical account of black life in the state since Paul Robeson described his boyhood in Princeton, New Jersey, in "Here I Stand" (1958), and E. Frederic Morrow's tour de force on black life in Hackensack, New Jersey, "Way Up North Down South" (1973). Ashby's work is probably of greater value to historians because he sheds light on specific developments in Newark, Springfield, and Elizabeth. We learn of heretofore obscure struggles, such as the remarkable coup engineered by black migrants from Dothan, Alabama, to gain control of the Hod Carriers Union local in Newark; the absurd lengths to which white adults preserved the color line between black and white children (Tale 84 is especially poignant on this problem); the ways in which Ashby, and undoubtedly League officials in other cities, walked the thin line between working class solidarity with whites and the need to eradicate the color barrier. Herein are tales of small yet memorable victories for blacks and whites of goodwill, incidents which form the basis of a much larger

human drama.

If the following 121 tales add to literature of the civil rights struggle in Newark and other cities, they tell us much about Ashby as a thinker, as a husband and father, and as a senior citizen. Indeed, they were written when he was approximately 80 years old. We learn of the influence of the black respectability ethic on his generation of race leaders, particularly those who were born in the southern states. Ashby's southern origins probably enabled him, as much as his education at Lincoln and Yale, to confront the problems of the black underclass with dedication and empathy.

"There is no one whom I am better than," he writes with characteristic humility. Yet he also admits that "there never has been in all the billions of people who have lived, who are now alive, and who will yet be born, anyone who is better than I am." These are the words of a man who has kept his long life in proper perspective, the words of a man unvanquished by racial oppression.

Newark, New Jersey
October 1980

FOREWORD

This is not an autobiography. I know that all literature must be classified, and I suppose that if what is written here had to be placed in an especially designated niche it would fall somewhere near the category of autobiography.

I am considered, by all who know me, to be a reasonably intelligent old man. My innate modesty would not dare me the illusive presumption that the flaccid, inconspicuous incidents of my life could ever be the subject for any literary venture so grandiose as an autobiography, or that it would be of such interest that anyone would bother to read it.

Will you please permit me to bend your ear for a few seconds while I tell you the reason that I even bothered to put these things down at all?

Until a few years ago, I was asked to do considerable speaking to high school students, civic clubs, church groups, and literary societies. I discovered that if I began my talks by relating some real experience of which I had been a part, I immediately set up an understanding and rapport between me and my listeners, since there would always be among them some who had gone through a similar experience, or knew someone who had. I could always be sure of this by the affirmative nodding of their heads, or the warm smiles of approbation on their faces.

After the program they would come up to chat with me. Always, without exception, some would ask if I had ever written these things down for a book or any kind of permanent record. My answer then was "no."

"But Mr. Ashby, you must write them down. They are your own unique experiences, known only to you. They are a part of the social history of our community and our times. If you do not put them down they will be lost, and our children will be denied much of the rich history of their people."

Primarily to escape the annoyance of their never-ending prodding, I decided to rid my system of them. Once I began, it was very easy — no more difficult than dashing off a casual letter to a friend. The incidents rolled into my mind faster than I could put them on paper. The entire manuscript was written in just 49 days. I did add some chapters later, but I am sure that I have not changed a dozen words or sentences in the original. I have stoutly disclaimed any and all autobiographical interest about what is here recorded. This, though, I must confess:

All of the incidents which I record here, I draw completely from my memory. Therefore, be warned, potential reader, if you are one who, when reading the autobiography of a man, cannot be satisfied with anything less than the unchallengeable correctness of every word in every incident, do not bother to open this book.

I do not expect historians or other wise men to point out inaccuracies or other flaws. Indeed, so careless and callous am I of the incontestable facts, that I would not bother to correct myself, even if I had at my fingertips an encyclopedia with all the knowledge in the world.

What does it matter if I say an event took place on Friday, the 13th, when it actually happened on Tuesday, the 31st? Who will care if I say that it was Sue Johnson who did so and so, when in truth it was Mary James? I would crush without mercy even the faintest suggestion of a conceit that would lull me into the false illusion that anything I here record would cause a statistician or historian to look upon it with anything but contempt.

This, though, I honestly promise and swear to before Almighty God: That every incident here recorded is in essence true and happened to me. Not one line is manufactured, nor one sentence invented.

— WILLIAM M. ASHBY

TALE 1

William S. Ashby was my paternal grandfather. He was a free Negro. I have two original receipts (said to be very rare among Negro families) dated 1854 and 1856.

They attest to the fact that William S. Ashby was a free land-owning, taxpaying man of color in York County, Virginia, almost 10 years before Mr. Lincoln issued his proclamation setting free the slaves.

I do not know the date of my grandfather's birth. From the vague and opaque little bits that I now can drag from my memory, put there when I was a very small child, and by things told me later by my older brothers and sisters, I think that I would not be very far off if I placed his birth date around 1820. Grandpa did not purchase his freedom, nor did he buy the land on which he paid taxes. He inherited that freedom and that land. His father before him had been born free and a landowner. And his father's father was free-born and land-owning.

So it can almost positively be asserted — and there are none to disprove it — that the Ashby family were free land-owning, taxpaying Negroes long beyond that.

He was a huge man, six feet, six inches in height. He was brawny, muscular with herculean strength. The reputation of his

power had spread all over York County and was known in bordering counties. The genes that made him grow so tall he transmitted to five succeeding generations.

Russell, a great-grandson, the son of Grandson Thomas, is six feet, four inches. Anthony, the son of Grandson John, is six feet, four inches. Stephen Smith, a son of Great-Granddaughter Theresa, is six feet, three inches.

He was not black. He was dark brown. Perhaps the same metabolic trick in the genes which caused him to grow so tall, also brought a change in the pigmentation of his skin. Nor were his features pronouncedly Negroid. While they lacked the fine chiseled angularity of a Greek god, they did not have the flatness and pudginess of a Nubian prince.

Grandfather was self-employed. He was an oysterman and a fisherman. Some said that he owned three fishing boats. All agree that it was no less than two.

These plied up and down the James River and out into the Chesapeake Bay. He was very successful indeed, but his success led to his very tragic end. Here is the story that was told in the county for many years after it occurred:

White men who were engaged in the same occupation as Grandpa became jealous of his success. Four of them decided to go to him and talk over methods by which catches could be more equally divided and sales to merchants more equally shared. An altercation developed.

Grandpa was able to immobilize two of his attackers in the house. He and the other two went outside to continue the battle. One of his assailants had a huge knife. He took one swipe at Grandpa's throat. It hit. Blood spurted from the wound like the burst of a geyser. He struggled. He got into the house. Weak and exhausted, he fell upon the floor. There the last drops of blood oozed from his massive body. Bloodless, death came.

A report that lived for many, many years later was that so much blood soaked into the floor boards that they eventually discolored. Even after the floor had been scrubbed hard and meticulously, the stains would not be removed.

This gruesome and brutal murder became a part of the baleful folklore of York County.

For generations elders repeated the cruelty. They told their children of the four white cowards, who came like thieves in the night and killed Ashby because he was a better fisherman than they, and because if they came one at a time he could out-tussle

the whole four of them.

The land which Grandpa owned was a plot of 30 acres, located in a little settlement called Carter's Grove. It is on the James River in York County, near three of the most famous places in this nation's history: Jamestown, where Captain John Smith and his little band set down to begin the country; Williamsburg, where Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry and Madison made the plans to throw off the oppressor; Yorktown, where General Cornwallis came to General Washington and gave up his sword.

This little settlement at Carter's Grove was an oddity in Negro life. It is said that all Negroes who lived there were free. The nearest thing to slavery was an Indian, known as Indian Joe. He was said to be indentured to the county judge.

TALE 2

Grandpa had two children: my father, William Button Ashby, and a daughter, Rhoda.

I knew the exact birthdate of my father. When I was very small I used to hear the older people talking about their ages, and the days on which they were born.

Very distinctly, I remember that they always said that Papa was born on the same day as McKinley. This meant nothing to me. I did not know who McKinley was. Seventy years went by. I developed an inquisitiveness about just who were my forebears.

From the caverns of my consciousness came two words – Papa and McKinley.

By now I knew the part that McKinley had played in American life. I felt a sort of pride that my father could claim at least a smattering of greatness, having been born on the same day as an American patriot and president.

I consulted an Encyclopedia Americana. It revealed that William McKinley, 25th President of the United States, was born in Niles, Ohio, January 29, 1843. This tallied exactly with the dates that I had heard the elders say about Papa.

Papa jumped over the broomstick with Sally Gary. The Garys, too, were free, land-owning, taxpaying Negroes. They owned land in Williamsburg.

Here is one of the oddities one sometimes runs across in the mixings of blood of families. Mama had a brother named Cary. Cary Gary married Aunt Rhoda, my father's sister. Their offspring now live in Atlantic County, New Jersey.

Cary Gary held his property in Williamsburg until John D. Rockefeller went down there and bought up the whole town to restore it to its pre-Revolutionary glory. Gary had two authentic colonial properties. All agree that he was paid well for them.

Papa and Mama had 12 children. No, that is not entirely correct. There were 13. Three died when very small, and 10 grew up whom I knew. Tom was the oldest, born in 1867. I was eighth in line of the 10 who lived. I was born October 15, 1889.

TALE 3

My mother's ancestors were people of some consequence. I have a transcript of my maternal grandfather, giving a cow to my mother and her children. They were pretty people to look at, and very proud. Among my mother's brothers and sisters were all the colors of the spectrum.

Aunt Molly was very fair. Henry B. had the dark smooth shade of an East Indian who had just stepped off the boat from Madras. Henry B. was short, stocky, muscular. He was vain, and never missed an occasion to vaunt his strength. He was challenged to lift a barrel of molasses from the ground to the floor of a dray. He did it. But the strain caused the breaking of blood vessels. The poor fellow died a gruesome death, with blood gushing from his mouth, nose, eyes.

My mother and father were never married in the traditional sense. In that part of Virginia at that time, there prevailed, so I am told, a custom called "Jumping across a broomstick." A man and woman wanted to marry. A broomstick was laid on the ground, the floor, or wherever. In the presence of some official or a minister, their parents and friends, they jumped across the broomstick. They were man and wife according to custom.

TALE 4

If a psychologist, or any other of the wise guys who purport to know all the details of the workings of the human mind, tells me that I do not remember incidents when I was about a year and a half or two years old, I shall shout out to him defiantly, "You're a liar!" For if my memory is in error about this, then all the other incidents in my life will be thrown out of kilter, and the timing on them would be off point.

Sainty Williams was a boy who lived in a house somewhere near ours. He was eight or nine years of age. He built a wagon. The wheels were disks of equal thickness and circumference, sawed from the trunk of a tree. The box was crude. I remember his acts as though they were happening at this very moment. He set me in the box and pulled me around the house with my brother Van, 2½ years older than I, pushing at the back.

There was a chinkapin tree near our house. I was too little to reach the branches of the tree and pick the nuts. I contented myself by picking up off the ground the little brown nuts which were shaped like the pot of a parlor lamp with a stem sticking up.

A thick patch of blackberries grew in the back of our house.

A rail fence separated them from our backyard. I could not crawl over the fence. I squeezed through the rails to get to the fruit. I saw something on the ground that looked like a piece of black rope. It was moving away from me. I did not know what it was. Long, long after, I was told that it was a black snake, but the bite of a black snake brings no threat to one's life.

TALE 5

My brother Matthew, whom we called "Bulla," said, "We are moving to Newport News." I did not know what he meant. I neither jumped for joy nor showed any sorrow in having to leave the place where I was born.

We were all put in a crude cart which was drawn by an ox, or as we called him, a steer or bull. He had a name, but I cannot for the life of me remember it just now. He was a lively, strong animal, not too old, for he moved fast. My father had raised him. He was treated with such tenderness that one listening, and not seeing Papa and the animal together, would surely have thought that Papa was talking to one of his children as he conversed with the bull. He took them to Yorktown to trade. He took them to church meetings on Sundays.

It was Sunday. We would go to Williamsburg and stay all night with Aunt Betsy. Aunt Betsy ran a restaurant, or "cook shop" - the colloquialism of the area. The dining room seemed to me an enormous place with the aroma of the foods cooking in the kitchen pervading it. Monday morning, we got on the train for Newport News.

TALE 6

We lived in a yellow house — or rather, it was once yellow. It was on 21st Street. Now that paint had weathered and on the clapboards were alternating patches of paint and raw wood.

It had four rooms — two up, two down. But there was a lean-to in the back, serviceable enough in warm weather, but no match for winters. The house was owned by the Old Dominion Ship Company. I remember hearing my mother say that the rent was \$4 a month.

TALE 7

The first thing that I remembered about Newport News is of my mother standing in the back yard, talking to a lady who lived next door. She spoke of death. This would be my first awareness of death.

Said the lady, "Did you hear that Brother So-and-So died last night?"

My mother, who did not know Brother So-and-So too well, was compassionate. She commiserated, "Poor Brother-So-and-So."

A few days later, I was in front of the house playing mumbledy-peg with a broken piece of file, on a plot of grass. A boy came up to me and told me that a girl down the street had just died. "Uhh, Uhn," I told the boy. "You can't die in the daytime. You have to die at night, 'cause I heard a lady tell my mother that."

TALE 8

Ninny Gholson lived about six or eight houses from me in the same block. He was a funny-looking boy with red matted hair and a tallow-colored face with three or four splotches of brown. They were weird shapes, but one stood out. It was easily identifiable. It was the shape of a turtle. Ninny boasted that it was a benign birthmark. He said that his mother told him that turtles live to be very old, and he would live to be a very old man.

Ninny was a spunky kid. He would pick a fight at the bat of an eye. He was a good fighter. I was in front of his house, playing marbles with him. We had a fuss over whose turn it was to shoot.

Two big boys, George Carey and Walter Richardson, both about 12, stood near. They came over and asked, "What's the matter?" " 'Tis my turn to shoot," I yelled.

" 'Tain't neither, it's my turn," objected Ninny.

"All right, fight it out," said George.

"I'm on your side, Sonny (my nickname)," said Walter.

We squared off, our dukes up, looking daggers at each other. We circled and circled, pawing at each other, neither striking a blow.

"This ain't no fight," said George.

He drew a line on the ground. "First one spit over that line is the winner."

I let go a gob.

Ninny grabbed me. We tussled. He broke loose. As he did, he shot a stiff right to my upper lip. In a split second, it puffed up. I felt warm liquid on my tongue. I began to cry. Ninny ran into his yard. "Ah, I hit old Sonny in the mouth," he taunted, with that sting in tone which is always in the voice of the victor over the vanquished.

"I bet you won't go down in front of my house and fight me," I challenged.

He laughed.

"I'll ride you piggy-back down there if you will go," I invited.

Ninny got on my back. I struggled with him to get him to my yard, puffing under the load.

He ridiculed me, "Giddy-up! Giddy-up, horsey!"

He shouted loud enough for all in the street to hear. When I was about to open the gate, Ninny jumped off my back and ran home.

"Ha! Ha! I made ol' Sonny give me a ride. You'se a fool to think I'd fight you in your own back yard," he called back.

TALE 9

Sometimes our mothers would send us down to Goldstein's Slaughter House to get 10 cents' worth of fresh meat. Sometimes we would get there just when an animal was about to be slain.

Old Man Brooks was the murderer. The head of the animal would be securely bound to a stanchion by a rope, or a chain around its neck.

Old Man Brooks stood before the animal. By him was a sledge hammer. He would cup his hands and skeet saliva through the gap in his front teeth, to give him a sure grip on the handle of the sledge. He raised the sledge and put it to the forehead of the bull, thus measuring the trajectory of his swing. He then planted himself firmly, and let go, a grunt synchronizing with the impact.

The animal swayed, groaned and went down. Urine streamed from its hairy penis, and a fart followed by soft excrement shot from its behind. Old Man Brooks, and another jumped on the fallen beast. With glistening sharp knives, they skinned it.

For me the sight was too gory. I stood some distance off. But the other boys did not mind. They stood waiting. Old Man Brooks would throw away the head and the tail. They would scramble for them. An ox head or an ox tail would make a good pot of soup. But I would not eat the meat if I thought that it was part of the animal I had just seen murdered.

TALE 10

Henry Bowman had "fits." All of us knew that. We were so cruel to him. But we were children. What did we know? We would poke fun at him and tease, "Go on, boy. You ain't got no sense. You have 'fits.' "

Henry claimed that the Lord had "tetched" him. He could see spirits. Early evenings a bunch of us would sit on the grass before our houses. We would amuse ourselves by telling tales. Henry always told the tallest tales. Suddenly he would shout, "Look at dat gread big elephant runnin' yonduh! Git outa da way, boy! Don't you see dat gread big red snake comin' after you?"

In fright we'd scream and run into our houses.

One day, Henry and I went swimming in Barradal's Creek. On our way home, we picked blackberries from the bushes that grew profusely alongside the path.

Henry reached his hand out to pick berries from a bush that was entangled in briars. On the brier was a green snake, the same color as the stem of the brier. Henry did not see the snake until it opened its mouth, and stretched its neck toward his hand.

"Sonny! Sonny!" he called. "I'm going to have a fit!"

I grabbed him. Deadweight, I was not strong enough to hold him up. But I did prevent him from falling to the ground.

Stretched on the ground, he shook all over, every particle of him. His eyes welled, opening intermittently. From his mouth came a deep groan, as if it had started in a far-off cave. Bubbles of foam rolled from his lips. I took off my shirt and stuck it in his mouth to keep him from biting his tongue off. Even as children, we have been told that if one has "fits," you act quickly to keep him from biting his tongue.

The heat was fierce. The sun stood right over Henry's face.

I broke limbs from a sassafras tree that was near and spread them over his face. The leaves kept out the heat of the sun.

I did not know what to do. But Henry could not be left alone.

In half an hour, perhaps, he looked up. He wiped off his face with my shirt. Then he jumped up, looked in the direction of where the snake had been, and then said "Let's go home, Sonny."

TALE 11

My mother was a remarkable woman. I cannot think of the particular facet in her character which would convince you of what I know to be a fact.

One Saturday afternoon, I heard my mother and father talking very loudly. They moved alternately from the front room to the kitchen. I could not make out what they were quarrelling about.

I heard my father say something about "going back up in the country."

In vehemence my mother shot out: "I ain't goin' to do it. I ain't goin' to take my children back in them woods where they can't git no schoolin'."

She didn't. Paroon this one bit of speculation from me: I have asked myself a million times what course my life would have taken if my father had prevailed and we had gone back to the country where I could get "no schoolin'."

TALE 12

Sainty Williams (his family had moved from the country to Newport News also) came to my house one morning. It was Saturday.

We played around for awhile. Then he said, "Let's take a walk down to the river."

We had to go through Bloodfield, which was as notorious as its name, to get to the James River. There we dug our toes in the wet sand as the waves receded, and pulled out clams.

On our way back, we walked along the shore until we came to Palmer's farm. The farm ran right down to the river's edge. We knew who Palmer was. Often he came through Hampton Avenue in his horse and wagon, taking produce "over town" where the white folks lived. He was a tall man with sandy hair. The house was

some distance from the farm itself, so that we did not go near it. The farm was almost entirely surrounded by brush and small trees.

We came to the watermelon patch. Vines criscrossed each other in all directions. Pearls of dew, not yet dried by the sun, still glistened on the leaves. Beautiful, green-striped melons were everywhere.

"Let's take one," Sainty urged.

We looked around. No one was in sight. Melons were almost at our feet. We had but to bend over and pick one up.

We did. We threw it on the ground to burst it. We grabbed the heart of the melon, pulling it in half. I had taken but one bite, when a voice floated across the farm.

"Don't run, or I'll shoot!" We looked. It was Mr. Palmer.

He came to us, a gun in his right hand. "I knowed I'd ketch you sooner or later. Y'all's the ones been stealin' my melons all this time."

He made us take up the broken rinds of the melon. Then he said, "Take me to your mammy and pappy. They got to pay for this."

He marched me through the streets to my house. He demanded 10 cents from my mother for the melon. Ten cents was a lot of money for a poor family.

My mother cried. She went into the house and brought back the money.

She was hurt, very deeply hurt. Her tears were not the deprivation of the 10 cents, hard as that was on our family's total possessions, but rather to think that her "Sonny was a thief." He had been marched through the streets with the evidence in his arms. All the neighbors could see. All the neighbors knew that "Sonny was a thief."

Anger, revenge overcame her. She took off my shirt and thrashed my bare skin to within an inch of my life.

Then she made me stand in the front yard, the broken melon beside me, all afternoon.

Kids came by and jibed, "Ah, look at old Sonny. He's a thief, a watermelon thief."

The closing words of my punishment were, "You is never again to steal even so much as a pin."

I have never since taken anything which was not mine without hearing the cautioning voice of my mother, "Ah! Ah! Put it back. It don't belong to you."

TALE 13

Mama was illiterate. I taught her to read. Never shall I forget her joy when she read the first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

I was never quite sure just how much of that she really read, or how much of it was from her memory, having heard it preached so many times.

But when she slowly and laboriously wrote her name, "Sally," I knew that she had truly learned.

TALE 14

I was a very good "shinny" player. Spare of build, I had good speed and amazingly quick reflexes.

Perhaps I am the only person alive who still remembers "shinny."

A true historian in tracing its origin might say that it was land hockey, the progenitor of ice hockey. A wise guy would sniff contemptuously and term it bourgeois or lowbrow hockey.

It had no rules. It could be played by one, or one hundred, on each side. We played in a field. The goals or bases could be a hundred or a thousand feet apart. The score could be nothing-nothing, 40-40, or 100 to 3. On Saturdays, we played all day.

The tools to play the game were simple and very crude. The puck could be a small block of wood, a wooden ball, a spinning top with the point removed, or even a tin can. Most important, though, was the "shinny" stick.

I am not one of those, caught up in any fervor of morality, who look back nostalgically upon the decency of the kids of my youth while at the same time crying out to heaven against the unbridled evils of the kids of this generation. What reformer actually has a reliable box score on any generation, and who has time now to give a damn about comparisons? Kids were always kids.

Perhaps kids in all ages have crowded the turnpikes to hell. But this much I do know. I never heard a kid in my time say, "I'm bored" or "I ain't got nothin' to do."

Making a "shinny" stick was an art. There were two kinds. One had a hammer head, much like the 8-iron of a golfer. One went into the woods and selected a small tree, preferably oak. It had to be as straight as a ray of sun, with few branches. He then cut the tree, taking up all of its roots. The root was then shaped like an

8-iron. This was a long-distance driver.

The other was a hook, like a hockey stick, only far more curved. For this, the tree was cut above the ground.

To make this, the kid drove two iron stobs deep into the ground, about two or three inches apart. One end of the stick was stuck between the stobs. We then bent the stick until it was the desired curve, after which it was held fast by another stob. Then we made a fire. If we had, say, three pennies among us, we bought three cents' worth of kerosene. Otherwise, we could always go to the sawmill and get kindling to start our fire. We were in real luck if we found some casings of copper wire. The oil in them made them burn fast and give a lot of heat.

When all the sap had been drawn from the stick by the heat, we grabbed it and ran fast to a tub of water, or the creek which was nearby. The water cooled it and set it. It would retain its shape thereafter, no matter what happened.

To start the game, the puck was put into a small hole. Each side had a center to get the puck out. Frequently, because of my agility, I was chosen for this position. We raised our sticks, each boy's stick touching the others. We counted 1-2-3 and the game was on.

Our mothers never worried about us that day. They knew that we were in some field playing "shinny."

TALE 15

My father smoked a corncob pipe. His was an odd ceremony.

Never was there a stream of smoke from his nose or mouth as he exhaled. Rather, he but slightly opened his lips, and the smoke came out in a little puff, an almost invisible puff.

All of the family went to church that Sunday morning. I wasn't feeling well; I was left home. On a window sill in the kitchen, I saw my father's pipe. On the top of it were burnt ashes, but in the bottom of the bowl was still some unburnt tobacco, left from his smoke after breakfast.

I was big. I would smoke a pipe, then brag to the kids the next day.

I went down to the "back house" (politely, the lavatory) in back of the yard. This so that there would be no trace of smoke in the kitchen when Mama came back.

I lit the pipe and took a few puffs. In a minute, the back house was whirling around, with me in it. My stomach was sick. The nausea doubled me over. I was going to die. I was groaning. I

do not know in what way I got the strength to get out. But I did get out. I did not get very far. The dizziness threw me to the ground. I do not know how long I lay there. In some manner, I got to my hands and knees. I crawled to a green covered sofa in our front room.

I was there when Mama came back. She saw me. Alarmed, she cried, "My Sonny is sick. My child is bad. I knowed that I shouldna went to church and left him here by hisself."

After dinner, Papa looked for his pipe to have a smoke. It was nowhere to be found. Mama declared her innocence of its whereabouts. She insisted that she had not seen it.

Papa went down to the back house. He happened to look down through one of the holes of the seat. There, stuck on a solid brown turd, was his pipe.

He came back to the house and told Mama. Mama was enraged on two counts. I had feigned illness. I had smoked.

"So you told me a story! When I get through with you, you'll run the next time you see a pipe."

The Sabbath saved me. I could not be punished on the Lord's Day. But the delay increased the anxiety and the agony. Monday always follows Sundays, and Mama never forgot.

I do not remember whether I have ever had a pipe in my mouth since.

TALE 16

Papa was shy and soft-spoken. No one remembers that he ever uttered a loud tone. But he was not a coward.

Mama was impulsive, spunky, firm. Sometimes she spoke in acrid tones to Papa. I imagine that Papa wept silently in his innermost self: "Sally, why do you hurt me so with your sharp tongue?"

TALE 17

I had a newspaper route; indeed, two routes. I delivered the morning and evening editions of the Newport News Daily Press.

I had a dog, "Bruin." He was a beautiful animal. A shepherd, his long hair was a tawny shade except that his belly and legs were white. Between his eyes, too, was a spot of white shaped as if it started out to be a star, then something went awry. Such a clean

dog, Bruin. If he ran through bushes and the burrs or dried leaves stuck to his long hair, he would wallow, slide on the short grass, or scratch himself until the last particle was gone.

Our house sat on brick pillars about two feet high. Bruin slept under the house. We slept on the second floor.

It mattered not how lightly my feet touched the floor when I got up in the morning — Bruin always heard me. When I came downstairs to open the front door to go out, Bruin leapt up on me whining and saying “Good morning! Good morning!”

In the winter it was still dark when I left home in the morning to go “over town” to the Daily Press office. Bruin walked beside me. If we encountered anyone of whom he was not sure, he began to growl menacingly. I remain baffled over how he developed this protectiveness over me. A little kid, I certainly did not know enough about animal training to teach him to be my sentinel. I did teach him how to deliver papers. I rolled the paper tight, put it in his mouth and pointed to the house to which it was to go. He eventually knew the route almost as well as I. If there was a 4-foot fence to be scaled, he did so with the grace of a gazelle. Bruin was both my guard and my delivery boy.

For my afternoon route, which was very long, I had the assistance of a horse for my transportation. The horse belonged to Dr. Scott, who lived across the street from me. In return for my use of the horse, I kept the stable clean and curried the horse. He was the orneriest horse that ever ate hay. They said that he was a broken-down race horse. As soon as I opened the stable door, he began to kick, one foot and then the other. He raised his head and made frightening sounds, his lower lip fluttering. When I tried to fill his water trough, he bit at me. When I attempted to curry his side, he leaned over to try to press me to the wall.

I had no trouble at all taking him to graze on the thick green grass that grew alongside the brook. But as soon as he saw me coming in the afternoon to get him, he raised his head and neighed negatively and challengingly. I had to grab up the stob to which he was chained and get away in a hurry to keep him from stampeding me.

Always, I had to whip him to get him to start on the route. But as soon as I turned around and headed homeward, I could scarcely hold him.

The gate of the yard was always closed. Once, when we got back, the gate was open. He saw it, and put on a burst of speed to the stable. I was scared to death. I knew that the door of the

stable was not high enough for me to get through upright on the horse. I would be smashed to a pulp. What to do must be decided more quickly than a lightning flash. I could think of nothing! When his head went through the door, I leaped for the iron track on which the door slid. I made it.

The horse went in. I dropped to the ground. I looked in at the horse and pulled the door shut.

TALE 18

I had one customer, Bom-Billy, who wanted the paper only on Sundays. He took the New York Sunday Journal. Bom-Billy was a gambler. He hung out in Sam Hall's saloon, which was on 18th Street, just at the beginning of Bloodfield.

Bom-Billy was a legend. He was a bad man. An ugly scar ran from the left front of his neck to the back, a razor wound. His right nostril was flattened down, so no orifice could be seen. There were endless stories of the men he had killed by shooting or knifing, or with his bare fist. There were also endless stories of the piles of money he had won cheating at cards or dice games. No one knew how old he was. It was said that he was an old man. But he was still tough, still feared.

I have seen him on the coldest winter day with nothing but pants and a red flannel undershirt. I saw, too, the rings of a pair of brass knuckles sticking up in his hind pocket.

The man could not read. He loved the cartoons of "Foxy Grandpa and the Katzenjammer Kids."

When I came to him with the paper he would greet me, "Sonny, what's ole Grandpa doin' today?"

He looked at the pictures in the panels and frequently broke out in laughter. I read to him what the characters were saying and he grunted, "uhn-uhn, uhn-uhn" all the time I was reading.

He then gave me the 10 cents for the paper, and also the paper back. No one ever knew Bom-Billy's real name.

TALE 19

One morning when I got back from "over town" with the papers, I saw little clusters of women talking in soft tones. They had sent their men off to work and now gathered to exchange whatever bits of news they had heard.

When I handed the paper to one of my customers, she asked, "Did anybody bother you 'over town' this mornin', boy?"

Another woman blurted out, "White folks done lynched a niggah over dere dis mornin'."

A gang of boys gathered. We ran to the woods at the end of town. There on the end of a rope, over a limb of a sycamore tree, on a gray morning, hung a man. He was quite dark. His mouth was open. His red tongue stuck out as if he wanted to say something. Perhaps he wanted to ask, "Why have you murdered me?"

It was a ghastly sight. His arms seemed too long for the sleeves of his jacket.

TALE 20

Our mothers used to send us down to the beach of the James River to pick up driftwood that had been washed on to the shore by the tide. The wood was dried and used for fuel. One day I walked out to the end of pier 6. In the river below me was an object of such gruesomeness that until this moment, I can still see it. It sickened me.

A drowned man floated on top of the water. Crabs swarmed all over him. Their blue claws went in piston-like fashion to him. They clawed each other for a favorite spot to pinch off his flesh. Even a fish juttet in to be in on the feast.

His nose was gone. His lips were gone, and his white teeth, washed by the salty water, were clinched and like little pieces of frozen snow. No face was left, and his bare right arm was fleshless. The meatless hands were like those of the skeletons in the books of our first lessons in physiology.

Here was one of the queer quirks of nature. Throughout all history live men had eaten dead crabs. Now live crabs were feasting on a dead man.

TALE 21

As early as I can remember, I loved to go to the theater. This horrified Mama. The theater was the home of the devil, and all the people in it were devils. To her it was by all odds the fastest and smoothest road to hell.

A play was coming to the Opera House which I wanted to see. It was "The Warrens of Virginia."

I told my brother that I was going. He warned me, "You better not."

I begged him not to tell Mama.

I went.

Back home about 11 o'clock, I climbed up a post of the porch on the back of the house. A door led from this porch into our room. I opened the door slowly and quietly and walked in. My brother, Van, and I slept together.

I undressed quickly and got into bed, crawling next to the wall.

Everything went fine. Mama had not heard me. I wouldn't get a whipping.

I went to sleep. I do not know for how long. Something struck me. I was being flailed with a strap. Mama was saying, "You disobey me. You go to that place, the devil's hole. I'll whip you within an inch of your life before I'll let the devil take you."

I rolled from the bed on the floor against the wall. I pulled my brother on top of me. In the darkness, Mama couldn't see. She was whipping him.

He was screaming, "Don't whip me, Mama. I ain't done nothin'." Then he started to punch me.

Mama was winded. Her strength gave out. She left the room mumbling something, while I got back in bed, crying.

But that did not stop me from going to theaters, and I have met as many devils on any street corner as I have in the theaters.

TALE 22

The Southalls were the meanest people who ever walked the earth. They were "po' white trash" at their worst.

The name "Southall" had been an honorable one in Virginia for several decades. But Beauregard Southall, called "Bo," was the black sheep. He had brought dishonor to the family.

He was a liar, a thief, a drunkard, a lazy, never-working lout. No one ever knew how they lived.

He married Elly. She too, was a liar, a thief and a drunkard. They spewed out kids like objects on an assembly line. They were funny-looking kids, blue eyes, straggly blond hair, long, scrawny, sallow faces. They never ate at a table. The kids sat on steps or walked around the house with a piece of cornbread or a chunk of boiled meat in their hands.

They lived in a house next to where the Daily Press was printed.

On warm days when the doors and windows were open, kids could be seen lying on the floor, stomping on the furniture, such as it was, or pulling railings off the fence in the back yard.

They quarrelled always. Elly would shout out to Bo, "You drunken ole son-of-a-bitch." He'd retort by calling one of the children a "no-good bastard."

There was one boy, "Plug" Southall. He was a bully. But he could fight and loved it. He could throw a stone as true as a big-league pitcher shooting a fast ball in a no-hitter. No one boy was a match for Plug Southall.

The colored boys waited in the street to get the afternoon edition of the paper.

Plug came out of his house. If his mood was bad, he'd say, "Let's run the niggers back over town." He might or might not hold off his action long enough for us to get the papers.

Then he and his sisters and brothers chased us to the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad tracks, which were the dividing line between the white and colored people.

We crossed the tracks to our side and took our stand. We threw rocks until our arms were weary, or until darkness came on.

TALE 23

In all the world there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to match the taste of a handful of fully ripe blackberries, picked fresh in the early morning from a bush on which dewdrops are hit by one errant ray of sun, making of them shiny little worlds of indescribable beauty.

I loved to go blackberrying. Sometimes I'd pick enough to fill a two-gallon tin pail.

No cook could ever come anywhere near equalling Mama's blackberry cobbler. She would knead the dough. Then she'd pinch off little balls. These she put on the table and rolled out to just the right thickness. She threw in a handful of berries, folded the edges and sealed them tight with the tips of her fingers. These were put into a cheesecloth bag and let down carefully into an iron pot of boiling water. We had to be ready to eat them when they were done, for they were always served hot. Mama made a sauce of brown sugar, lemon, and butter which too was hot as it was poured over them. I have never tasted its equal.

One morning I went for berries. There had been a frightful rainstorm the night before, but now the sun was warm and clear.

I was in great luck. I picked oodles of berries – sometimes a quart without moving out of my tracks.

That night, as soon as I got in bed, I itched terribly. I was on fire. I scratched and scratched, turned and turned.

My brother punched me and said "Stop turning over. I can't sleep."

I could not. Then he hollered, "Mama, come here and see what's the matter with Sonny."

Mama came. I told her I itched.

She said nothing. She knew. I had picked up "chiggers" from the wet blackberry bushes. They settled in colonies around my groin and under my arms.

Mama went downstairs, got a bowl, poured in it some kerosene and a tablespoon of salt. She stirred until the salt dissolved. She brought me this with a piece of outing flannel cloth, and told me to swab the itching parts.

This helped some. But I was still awake when morning came.

TALE 24

There was going to be a great revival at First Baptist Church. A great revival preacher was coming. Newport News was a sin-sick city. God had warned it of its evil ways. He would give it just one more chance. This God-sent evangelist would "set it to right." He would cleanse it and make it the way God wanted it to be.

Mothers wanted their children to "get religion." They urged — rather they forced — them to go to the mourners' bench to hear this great preacher.

Mama told me that I must go to church. I joined a whole row of kids on the front bench of the church, just below the pulpit.

The evangelist was a huge man. He opened his mouth with a shout, and the volume of his voice never abated. The sound rang around the rafters of the room.

"Come to God! Come to God, my little children. God is waiting."

His plea was echoed by the adults in the congregation: "Come, Lord, come, come. My Jesus, do come."

A girl a little distance from me jumped up. She screamed, "God! My God! I got religion! You done snatched my soul from the gates of the burnin' hell this evenin'."

A boy next to me stood up and begged, "Jesus, dear Jesus, save my soul! Take me out of this vale of sin."

The preacher, in deep humiliation and gratefulness, shouted, "Thank you, thank you, Lord, for saving this child. You done took her away from old Satan's grasp."

Then he threatened, "You who are stubborn, you with hearts of stone, soften your hard hearts. Give them to God. You are in danger. This wicked old world could come to an end this very night. The first time, God destroyed this world with water. This time he is comin' with fire and brimstone. Where will you go? Where will you go, sinners? The birds will be flyin'. The rabbits, the

foxes, the snakes will be runnin'. But ain't no place they can hide. God's fire is hot. It will catch them."

My head had been cupped in my hands. I raised my head, opened my fingers, and looked up at the bellowing man. I felt no fear of his threats.

Smithfield was just seven miles directly across the James River from Newport News. I had but to get into one of the boats tied up at the pier, and go over to Smithfield.

Not even God could make his fire burn up all that water in the James River.

TALE 25

Dora Wright was a whore. She lived on the second floor of a house on 23rd Street. She was one of my newspaper customers. I do not know how old she was. This I know: She had been a very beautiful woman in her youth. Even now, her face was marred only by the discoloration of one of her front teeth. Her history was not unlike those of many girls who drift or are lulled into prostitution. She had been born in Farmville, Virginia. She had been lured away from home to Norfolk in her teens. From there she came to Newport News.

It was just dusk when I opened the door on the first floor. I had to walk through a hall, perhaps 12 or 15 feet, to get to the foot of the stairs to ascend to her rooms. The door to her rooms must have been open.

I heard the voice of a man. His language was shockingly profane and vulgar.

Dora must have heard me come in. She slammed the door. I was not frightened. I stopped. I did not know what to do.

Then Dora said, "Shut up! Shut up, you fool! Here comes my paper boy. He ain't like you. He got a nice mother. She's raisin' him to be a man of some 'count."

I went upstairs. Dora opened the door a crack, and took the paper.

I thought nothing of this incident. But why, after all these years, do I still remember the face and the words of Dora Wright?

She was in the depths of human degradation and she knew it.

She made no pretense of being anything else. The mystery will not let me go. How could this woman, at the very bottom of the social structure, have such a noble thought about me? Did she see in me something which she had missed? Why did she want to protect me from profanity, vulgarity? Why was she so sure that I

had a nice mother? Could she have been substituting my mother for her mother? Did she wish that she had been my mother?

If I were given a scepter, and placed on a throne to pass judgement on the acts of human conduct, I would let this woman go scot-free. For she had committed no sin, save the giving away of her body for profit. Was it not hers to give, if she wanted to? She served men sexually and satisfied them. How different were her services from that of a doctor, lawyer, preacher, teacher?

When Jesus spoke, saying, "Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins which are many are forgiven," he was speaking of Dora Wright.

TALE 26

The school was going to give a concert. I was chosen to "speak a piece." Mama was pleased to the extent of exhilaration. She went all about the neighborhood saying her "Sonny" was going to "speak a piece" at the school.

I had to have a new suit. How would I get it?

Sol Nachman, a Jewish merchant, ran a dry goods store on Jefferson Avenue, about three blocks from our house. Sometimes, when a garment needed alterations, he would bring it to Mama.

She could get the suit from Nachman.

She took me to the store. I was outfitted with a suit. It was gray. Every one said that I looked nice in it. The suit cost \$3. The terms between Mama and Sol were that she would pay him 50 cents down, and a quarter a week until the debt was liquidated.

My teacher was Miss Helen Virginia. She had been born in Rome, New York, but was sent as a young lady to Hampton, Virginia, to complete her education at Hampton Institute. She came to Newport News to teach after her graduation from Hampton.

Never since men commanded youngsters to sit at their feet to be instructed in the ways of life, has there been a lovelier teacher than Miss Helen Virginia. She simply exuded pleasure, kindness, interest in us. I was always in a hurry each morning to get to school and in her class.

She was a diminutive woman, scarcely taller than some of the children. But her stature never hindered her discipline if it was needed. If a boy misbehaved, she immediately exerted the authority of her position. But she never scowled. She never depended upon a glum countenance to frighten a child.

Even until this moment, I can see myself standing on the

rostrum behind a row of kerosene lamps, and hearing my voice say,

*"Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."*

When the concert was over, Marian Fleming, my rival for the smartest student in the class, came up to me and said, "You spoke your piece nice, Sonny."

Much later in my life, I would hear again of Marian.

TALE 27

When the Spanish-American War was over, they brought boatloads and boatloads of soldiers to Newport News. From the piers they would disembark and go aboard the trains of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, which would take them to points from which they would scatter to their respective homes. They must go directly on the train from the boat. They were forbidden to go into town.

I became a temporary sales boy of produce, using my experience as a newspaper boy to peddle my wares. I went through the crowded cars, selling bags of Bull Durham tobacco, and packages of Sweet Caporal cigarettes. I paid 5 cents for each and sold them for 15 cents. Also, I sold a ginger cake, about six inches in circumference and an inch and a half in thickness, for 10 cents. This cost me 2 cents.

While the trains stood on the tracks, gangs of kids in little patches stood alongside, watching in wonderment. At some unexpected moment, a soldier threw a handful of coins out a window.

They laughed in glee as they watched the kids scramble on the ground to pick up a nickel, dime, or penny.

I thought all these men in uniform the most amazing and enviable I had ever seen. How fascinated a boy is by the uniform of a soldier!

If nations intend to keep on murdering each other in wars, they had better see to it that their military is always dressed in a uniform that excites the imagination of a boy and causes his heart to pound like the beating of a drum. Men dressed in new business suits, or even clean pressed overalls, will never be aroused enough to fight to save their own country, or that of any other land, if it means that they must wade through slush and lie in mud, thus taking the crease out of their pants.

TALE 28

Papa died when I was 11. He died of dropsy. His illness was long, and he suffered. Dr. Dixon came and tapped his legs to draw the water.

Mama kept mosquito netting over his bed to keep away the flies and mosquitoes. We took turns, Alice, Van, and I, fanning him to give what relief we could from the sometimes unbearable heat. We did this until midnight. Then Mama would get up and stay with him until morning.

The funeral was at the First Baptist Church. For the life of me, I cannot remember whether Papa was buried in the graveyard in Newport News, or whether they took him up in the country and laid him to rest on the land that we owned.

TALE 29

I was to graduate from school in Newport News, Va., in 1904. The exercises would be Monday night. I had won the honor of being chosen to "speak the piece" for the class.

Mama had gone North, where she hoped to get a job as a domestic, or perhaps work with a tailor on a sewing machine.

I wanted to see Mama. I wanted to be with Mama. I would go to see her. I had no worry about money. I had saved from my paper route. Also, I earned money carrying hot dinners to the shipyard.

Mama lived with my brother, Tom, in Roselle, N.J. I had no idea how I would get there.

One of my newspaper customers was Peter Jackson, who lived alone and worked as a riveter at the shipyard.

I told Peter my plans and asked him how I could get to New Jersey.

On the Monday of the graduation exercise, Peter took me to Norfolk. I got there about three in the afternoon. At six o'clock, I was on an Old Dominion liner bound for New York.

I ate supper. Almost before I could get up from the table, I felt a nausea. I was seasick.

The night was miserable. I did not know whether I might have received any assistance from the ship's personnel. I was too afraid to ask.

By the time the ship docked at about three o'clock I felt all right. I picked up my suitcase, made of cardboard, and went down the gangplank with the assurance of a world traveler.

I went through a building and on to the street. I had read about the towering height of the Singer Building. I asked a man if I was near the building.

"Walk up to Broadway, kid, and you'll see it," he answered.

I did. I saw the building. I marveled at its dizzying height. Then I went back to the office of the Old Dominion line to inquire how I would get to New Jersey.

A clerk in a cage looked at a book. Then he said, "Go up here to the Jersey Central Railroad and get a train for Elizabeth. They'll tell you there how to get to that other town."

I walked under an arch after I got off the train in Elizabeth and came out on Broad Street. Without the embarrassment of an inquiry, I heard one man ask another how long it would be before the next trolley came for Roselle. I would follow this fellow.

At the sight of me, Mama was ecstatic with joy. I had not told her that I was coming. She did not ask me any questions.

TALE 30

The next morning, I went out to look around the town. Four or five blocks away, I saw some boys playing ball in a large empty lot. When I got up to them, they stopped. They asked me questions. "Where did you come from? What's your name? How old are you? Who you going to live with in Roselle?"

There was Charley Wilmore, his brother, Sam, Joe Lewis, Alfred Pulley — these I remember.

They asked me to join them in the game. They put me at shortstop. Alfred Pulley hit a ball to me. I fielded it cleanly.

Charley Wilmore ran to first base and began to yell at me. "Peg the ball to me! Peg the ball to me! Hurry up!"

I did not know what he meant. In Newport News we always said, "Chunk the ball here! Chunk the ball to me."

My brother Tom worked as a gardener during the summer. His employers were some of the wealthiest people in the town.

That morning he was going to the home of Mrs. Howe. He took me with him.

Mrs. Howe lived in a large frame dwelling on the corner of Chestnut Street and 4th Avenue. A porch ran all the way across the front of the house. A crescent-shaped driveway for carriages was covered with trap rock, about the size and shape of Brazil nuts. Blades of grass shot up between the stones. My brother told me to pick out the grass. I had had no previous experience at such

a task.

Not much time passed before I felt a pain in my spine. I got up on my hands and knees. I wore short pants. The stones stuck in my bare skin. Some blades of grass had roots deep in the earth.

To get them out by the roots I had to pull away the stones and then bore my fingers into the ground. The friction wore the skin off my flesh. Soon I saw tiny specks of blood.

My fingers pained me. I cried softly. Tears stood in my eyes. They blinded my vision of the grass. The more I picked, the more shoots of grass grew around me.

But I did not let brother see my tears. I whimpered until my eyes were dry. And I did not complain.

TALE 31

In October, brother went to Newark to work as a waiter in Allen's. The business was owned by Charles Weldon. The Weldons lived in South Orange. My brother and sister-in-law had worked for the Weldons, he as butler, she as cook.

Although it had been some time since they worked for the Weldons, a strong master-servant relationship held them together. Brother could always get a job with Weldon.

The R. H. Allen Co. was a fine catering establishment, located on Broad Street, just across from Military Park. It catered to people of wealth all over Northern New Jersey. It operated, too, a fine restaurant, largely for executives of businesses. Fashionable ladies came there in the afternoons to eat French ice cream, sip tea and gossip. Also it sold fine pastries and chocolates, made on the premises by Gus, a man from Alsace-Lorraine.

Brother got me a job there as a delivery boy.

Mama wanted me to get "more schooling." I, too, was ambitious.

Brother knew a Rev. John H. Locklear, minister of the Plane Street Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Locklear was a graduate of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Brother told him about me. He responded with overwhelming kindness and cooperation. Throughout the winter he coached me in grammar and arithmetic to help prepare me to get into Lincoln.

TALE 32

There was a girl, Leanna Fatman. She was a junior in the Roselle High School. She played the piano beautifully. I had more than a passable singing voice. Moreover, I knew the words of the two great song hits of the day, "Meet Me in St. Louis" and "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree." We made quite a duo, she playing the piano and I singing.

I was the new boy in town. I became her feller, and she was my girl.

I used to walk her home from the Second Baptist Church. One Sunday, we went to a very far-away place, Coney Island. I remember, too, that we went to Brooklyn to the Majestic Theater to see Williams and Walker, who were playing there in a musical entitled "Abyssinia."

The Seldens in Morristown invited us to spend a Sunday with them. Morristown was hard to reach. We must take the trolley to Elizabeth, get off there and get another trolley all the way to Morristown, the end of the line.

The Seldens were quite a family. There were two daughters - try as I may, I cannot remember the name of either - and a son, Ben.

They operated a grocery store in a small one-story building next to their dwelling. Mrs. Selden and the girls ran the store. Mr. Selden was engaged in other occupations in the town. The profits from the store, coupled with the earnings of Mr. Selden from a variety of business pursuits, totalled a considerable sum. Indeed they were regarded by many as affluent.

We had a lovely day, an indescribably lovely day, at the Seldens'.

We left for home just as dusk was coming on. It was, I guess, about 9:30 when we got back to Roselle. We got off the trolley at Second Avenue and Poplar Street.

The night was brilliant. Never since it began its first track across the heavens had the moon shone more brightly. One side of the block was field, enclosed by a rough rail fence. A cow and a horse grazed in the field. So luminous was the moon that the actual colors of the animals could be seen with clarity. The animals heard our approach, stopped grazing, and looked up at us. We were invaders. We had disturbed their calm. They did not welcome us.

Halfway in the block, I stopped. I kissed Leanna. The girl seized me. Her grip was far beyond her years. She bared her breast.

She literally begged me to seduce her. I resisted her wiles, and beat off temptation. I have often wondered whether I was too damned moral, or too big a damned fool.

TALE 33

Mama got me ready to go to Lincoln University. She sewed \$50 inside my shirt. This was my tuition. The money was in a variety of denominations - 1's, 2's, 5's, and a single 10.

She cautioned me not to take off my shirt, and to go and give the money to the president just as soon as I got to the school.

Her farewell was: "Be a good boy, and get your lessons good."

I had about \$10, some of it in coins, left for myself. This she secured in an empty Bull Durham bag. All of this money was mine. I had earned and saved it from my job as delivery boy at Allen's.

I was assigned a room number 16, located on the second floor of Ashmun Hall. My roommate was Leon Bivins from Philadelphia.

The next day, I went out on the campus. I wore a blazing red turtle-neck sweater. My hair, at 16, had a slightly red tinge.

The upper classmen let out a great guffaw at me. One of them, Mzimba, an African of the Zulu tribe, bellowed out, "Hello, Red." I have never been sure whether he was talking about my hair or my sweater. No matter. The name stuck with me throughout my college career and for some years after.

TALE 34

Hazing of freshmen by sophomores at Lincoln was a terror. No one of us ventured anywhere alone. The risks were too great. Even attending classes we went in groups. In a crowd was more protection - or so we thought.

There was one fellow, Pritchard, from Augusta, Georgia. He was a demon. I always pictured him as an overseer of slaves with gangs of frightened men cowering before him. He had a bullwhip made of cowhide, about 12 feet long. About eight feet of it was plaited in a braid of four or five strings. One single string of the rest was loose. He handled it with the deftness of a rancher with his lariat. At any unexpected moment, one felt a sting on his leg. A look revealed that there was a welt, the result of a flip from Pritchard's whip. It was his boast that he could flick a fly off the end of a log with one lash of the whip. I, for one, believed him.

Then came our time as sophomores. We must outdo the savagery of the class which had preceded us.

In some manner through no action of my own, I had become a class leader. Physically, I know better than anyone who ever ate ham and cabbage that I am not the most courageous person in the world. But I had to go through the motions to justify the confidence which had been thrust upon me.

At Lincoln, there were no lavatories in the dormitories. Each student had a metal pail which he used at night for urinating.

In the early evening a gang of freshmen – contemptuously, we called them “preps” or “dogs” – were coming into the building. I ran into my room, grabbed my pail, hastened to the head of the stairs, and dumped the whole bucket of piss down on their heads.

I was expelled for two weeks. I did not tell Mama.

TALE 35

My brother, Van, lived in New York. He had a job as a janitor in a six-story apartment house on 79th Street. He had living quarters in the basement of the building. I could share his bed. He would see to it that I had food.

One night after supper, I took a walk out on Columbus Avenue. I had gone not more than two blocks when I noticed a man walking toward me. He was immaculately dressed, his gold cufflinks sparkling in pure white cuffs.

When he reached me, he stopped. In a half-smile, he said “Hello!”

Alone with no one with whom I could converse, I welcomed the friendliness of the absolute stranger. But I made no answer. The suddenness of the salutation puzzled me. Instantly, I wondered if I knew the man and where.

Then he asked, “Where are you going?”

I replied, “Nowhere.”

“Would you like to make a dollar?” Thrilled by the thought of having the money, I did not ask him where, or what I must do to earn it.

He told me to go with him to his apartment. His were the most luxurious living quarters I had ever seen.

In the room, he bade me take off my jacket. Then he came over and put his arms around me.

Horried to death at the man’s act, I grabbed my jacket and ran out of the room.

I told my brother what had happened.

He laughed and asked: “Didn’t you know what he was up to?”

“No.”

“The man was a cocksucker. He wanted to suck you off.”

TALE 36

I was not the intellectual leader of my class. At Lincoln, grading was done in groups: I to VI.

One semester, I made Group I. The rest of the time I dropped into Group II, and there I stayed.

But I was excellent in English. My teacher was Professor George B. Carr. He was a Scotsman, a very pleasant and handsome man. About 60, I guess, he had cotton-white silky hair; few strands, if any, had been lost. His beard and moustache were white. The uncovered part of his face was ruddy — as ruddy as one 30 years his junior.

I can still hear his voice with its natural burr as he scanned Milton's "Paradise Lost."

"Of man's/first dis/obedi/ence and/the fruit..."

"Well now, is there a student who can give me the predicate to that very, very long sentence?"

I called out, "Sing."

"You are right, Mr. Ashby. Very good! Very good!"

I was very sharp in Greek, too. Dr. William Hallock Johnson was my teacher. I was very fond of him. He took great pride in me. Indeed, I was sort of his "show-off" pupil. By the time we had gotten half-way through Xenophon's "Anabasis," I could read it like an Athenian.

TALE 37

"Halley's Comet is coming," Professor Walter L. Wright, our teacher in mathematics, made that unembellished declaration to us one morning in 1910 in our class in astronomy. The announcement obviously delighted him. There was an exuberance in his tone as the words came out, and a warm glow lit up his round, ruddy face. It was as if he was going to welcome a visitor about whom he had heard many beautiful things, but whom he had not yet seen.

No statement ever fell on deafer ears. What could this bit of erudite information mean to us? We were all about 20 years of age. Each one of us had come from a home where the level of schooling for our parents ranged from second grade to zero. How could it be expected that we would have any awareness of a subject of such sophistication?

Professor Wright was quick to detect our ignorance. He began immediately to dispel it by telling us that Edmund Halley was a

great English astronomer in the 17th century. He had seen this strange phenomenon while on a trip to an island in the South Seas. It was millions and millions of miles away in space. By careful mathematical calculations he proved that it would come into view for man to see on earth every 76 years. "You young men are fortunate," he said. "You will see it and then it will pass away into the limitless universe, not to be seen again until 1986. In all probability all of us by that time shall be dead."

As I recall it, we were told that the comet would appear in the East between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. We stood on the east side of Cresson Hall. The morning was beautiful: Black all around us, but in the heavens a billion stars shining like polished pinheads — so low and near that Christy Mathewson, the incomparable pitcher on the New York Giants baseball team, throwing one of his straight fast balls, could have jolted one loose from its pinions.

It was quiet, as noiseless as death. The stillness was abruptly and temporarily interrupted by the frantic cackling of some hens that were roosting on the limbs of some fir and hemlock trees that stood behind Vail Memorial Library.

Professor Wright was waiting for us. He had set up a telescope on a tripod.

Only one of us had ever looked into a telescope. Eugene Bennett, a classmate from Augusta, Georgia, said that while walking on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City one night, he came upon a barker with a telescope who was giving a fascinating spiel about the mysteries and beauties of the moon. The man grabbed him and pulled him to the eye of the instrument. He gave the guy a dime to take a peek.

As we looked with wonder and awe into the instrument, Professor Wright explained the known components which made up the comet. He told us that comets are very old, perhaps going back to the origin of the solar system. Scientists speculate that their composition is of frozen water, frozen carbon dioxide, and frozen ammonia. I cannot remember a single emotion which this mysterious spectacle, running like hell in an orbit a trillion miles away, aroused in me as I looked in the telescope.

I remember only what I thought it looked like. To me it was a huge rag doll, turned upside down, its flat, round face just above the horizon, its long legs stretching straight up until its toes almost touched the pinnacle of the heavens.

TALE 38

Lincoln University's football team went down to play the football team of Howard University in Washington. It was on Thanksgiving Day. I went to a student dance that night.

On Friday, we started back to school.

My roommate, Leon Bivins, had a friend, Lee Shipley, in Baltimore. He suggested that we stop by Baltimore and see Lee.

We went by trolley from Washington to Baltimore, since the fare on the trolley was half that on the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Lee welcomed us. His mother and sister were equally hospitable. Mrs. Shipley told Lee to ask us if we would spend the night with them.

Lee's father was a caterer, a very well known one. On Thanksgiving Day he had catered to a party of very rich people. He brought home some of the food left from the service.

At supper we were served terrapin a la king. At Allen's in Newark, I had seen the cooks package this delicacy when going out on a party. But I had never tasted it before. It was delicious, absolutely delicious.

As a boy in Newport News, we used to catch the yellow and brown land terrapins and play with them. Indeed, we would take a paper bag, or a part of an old newspaper, light it and stick it to the behinds of the slow plodding things to make them race each other. I marvelled anything of such delectable taste could come from those things we played with, but never ate.

Lee took us out. We went to the Goldfield Inn. That was a bar and restaurant owned by Joe Gans. Mr. Gans was in. Lee knew him well. Lee's older brother and Joe were the same age. Lee introduced us to him.

"Now," I thought, "won't I have something to talk about and gloat over to the rest of the students? I had met and shaken hands with the great Joe Gans."

At the piano in one corner of the room sat a young man.

Lee said, "Eubie, meet my friends from Lincoln University."

We exchanged greetings. Lee asked him to play something for his friends. He smiled and took off on the piano.

This Eubie Blake became one of the nation's leading composers. Two of his songs, "I'm Just Wild About Harry," and "Memories of You," are played somewhere every day.

Eubie is still alive. I saw him on television not long ago when he was honored at an ASCAP meeting.

TALE 39

Lincoln University is remotely located, half-way between Philadelphia and Baltimore. There are no big towns near it. The rural surroundings afforded no avenue whatever for student recreation or pleasure. We had to invent our own fun. Only on the rarest occasions could we expect to get to the city. We developed a plan by which we would be invited to a city. Four or five students would get together and form an "Oratorical Team."

Each one would learn a speech. We then offered our talents to a church or club in a city for an "Oratorical Contest." If a church or club invited us, we were guaranteed roundtrip transportation; sometimes supper, a night's lodging and breakfast. Actually, our primary reason for going was to get into town, perhaps for a dance — always, of course, to see the girls.

We were very serious about our performance. We wanted to please ourselves. We did not want to cast a blot on our school. Then, too, there was the natural personal pride which stimulated one to do well.

Christmas was coming. I had no money to get away from school for the holidays. To have to spend the holidays at Lincoln was an insufferable indignity. We were all poor. But one's poverty was multiplied if his parents were so indigent that they could not scrape up enough money to get him home for Christmas.

I organized an "Oratorical Team." On it were Herbert Millen, Clarence Brown, Emile Raven, Isaac Showell, and myself.

The Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, invited us to present a program. The contest was held on December 26, a perfect date to get us into town for Christmas.

We invited a lot of girls we knew. They came. I remember Laura Claxson, Jean Norwood, Bessie Stewart, Bessie Westpetal, Irene Yarborough, Judy Holland.

The main floor of the sanctuary was almost filled. The girls went to the balcony in the rear of the church.

By all odds, Herbert Millen should have won the contest. He was the best speaker, a good-looking fellow with a very rich and musical voice.

We did not appear in alphabetical order; that would have made me first. We drew straws. I was fourth.

Millen arose and began. Then an awful thing happened. The girls who were in the rear and facing the rostrum, began a whole series of unexpected antics. They waved their big hats, cackled,

cleared their throats, coughed, flailed their arms, thumbed their noses, puckered their lips, threw kisses, made gargoyle faces. The purpose was clear. They wanted to disconcert us and make us fluff our speeches.

Millen was declaiming Patrick Henry's famous oration. He got as far as "Three millions of people armed in the holy cause of liberty." He repeated this line three times, searching for the next words. He could get no further. In shame, he turned and sat down.

The girls were delighted at his failure. They took a satanic glee in the pain they had caused Millen, and expressed it by a rapid clapping of their hands.

Raven then began. He was saying Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. He got as far as "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here. But it can never forget what they did here."

He was stumped. I remembered the next line. I tried to prompt him. The girls broke into laughter. He cursed them. I heard what he said. He, too, had to sit ingloriously.

My time came. By now, I had observed what was happening. Now their antics were unbelievable. They increased both in intensity and variety. I was declaiming "Spartacus to the Gladiators at Capua."

I fooled the girls. I kept my eyes fastened on the first floor, never looking up at the distractions of the girls. I got through without a flaw. The result was amazing. I never fully recovered from the shock.

I won the gold medal. I still have it. I have never had it on.

TALE 40

No parents enjoyed the financial affluence to send their boy to Lincoln and pay the entire cost of his education. All of us worked to earn our way through college. There were three occupations open to us. We could be waiters or bellboys at a summer resort hotel at the shore or in the mountains. We could be porters (perhaps waiters if lucky) on a Pullman train. We could be porters, waiters, linen men, or check room clerks on the Hudson River boats, plying between New York and Albany, or boats to Fall River, Providence, or Boston.

My plan was always to earn enough by the Fourth of July to buy my clothes, a suit, pair of shoes, couple of shirts, and — every other year — a hat. My earnings in July would cover my tuition, books, and perhaps an occasional trip to Philadelphia.

June and July had gone by. I had earned nothing. I was going to be a junior. I saw my school days at an end. I was scared to death — in a genuine panic.

Among old hotel men, there was a saying that one could make a killing in Saratoga if he was lucky. I would go to Saratoga for the August racing season. It was my last, my only chance. I had no way out.

The landlady where I went for lodgings demanded two weeks' rent in advance. I was able to persuade her to accept one week.

I had been told that getting a job was no problem. I would go to work at either the Congress Hotel or the United States Hotel. I went to a room in the United States Hotel. There must have been a hundred men lined up waiting to get their names registered for employment. They never reached me. My frustration now was beyond measure. Everything had slipped past me. I did not know what to do.

The next day I walked to the race track. I ran into a lot of touts and wise guys who were discussing the horses. Almost all of them spoke of a sure thing in the fourth race that was going off at 2 to 1. That was all so confusing to me. I had never been around a race track before. I had left just \$2 and some change. If I placed the \$2 on this sure thing and won, I'd have \$4; but if he lost, what then?

All along the fence which enclosed the track were men standing, or on their knees in circles. I looked closely. They were crap games.

In desperation, I decided to get into one of the games. I nudged in between two big fellows.

When the dice came to me, I grabbed them. I threw a dime on the ground.

"This ain't no nit game," shouted a gruff-looking fellow across from me. "Twenty-five cents is the lowest fade."

I shot back, equally gruff: "I lost my money in this game. I want a chance to get even, or get some of it back."

"Aw, let the little yeller son-of-a-bitch go," bellowed one next to me.

I rolled the dice. "Seven." I kept rolling. I had a hot hand. The dice went crazy in my clutched fingers. I couldn't lose.

Even before I realized it, there appeared to be \$5 or \$6 in coins in winnings before me. Cautious and frightened, I dragged down about \$5. Luck was on my fingertips on each roll. Another

\$6 or \$7 piled up. I wanted to get out, but how? If I took my winnings and tried to quit, some tough guy would knock me off because I had pulled out before the dice got around to him again and given him a chance to get back what I had taken from him.

An unbelievable thing happened. A cop, his long billy swinging in a cowhide loop, came along.

"Break it up! Clear out, boys!" he shouted.

We dove for the coins on the ground, got what we could along with dirt, and skeedaddled in various directions.

TALE 41

Back at my lodgings, I found a letter awaiting me. It was from my sister-in-law, Lucy, in Roselle. She had a sister who was married to a Mr. Jones and lived in Schenectady. The letter advised me to go to see Mr. Jones. He had a job for me.

Mr. Jones was employed by the Mohawk Hotel, a hostelry operated by a German named Zimmerman and an Irishman named Sweeney.

It was a stag hotel and catered very largely to "drummers," as salesmen were then known.

It had a Turkish bath, the only one in that whole area. Its rooms were practically always full.

Mr. Jones had full charge of the hotel at night, after the owners and the desk clerk had gone home. They were in need of a boy to run the elevator, and do other odd things during the day. I was hired for that job.

Residents of the hotel would ask me where they could get a shoe shine, or have a suit cleaned and pressed. I set up a shoe shine stand in the lobby. Mr. Zimmerman praised my industriousness.

There was a Jewish tailor about a block from the hotel. I could always figure on a tip of a dime, sometimes a quarter, from a guest for this valet service.

The Delaware and Hudson Railroad station was some distance from the hotel. Drummers had to carry their own heavy luggage between the hotel and the station, or engage a horse and carriage,

which was expensive. I got a small wagon. I would transport the baggage for a quarter.

The hotel had a restaurant. They served what was called a "businessman's lunch."

Four girls were employed as waitresses, but they never were all there. One would hook on to a guy and go to Saratoga to the races for the day. I was pressed in to fill the gap.

I worked with unbelievable rapidity, and could run all around the girls. The cost of the lunch was 40 cents. The diner always gave a half-dollar, thus a 10-cent tip.

I stayed on the job until the third week in September. When I returned to school, I had lots of money – nearly \$200 – and was almost rich.

TALE 42

Jack Johnson knocked out Jim Jeffries in Reno on July 4, 1910. I was at work that night as a waiter in the Islesworth Hotel in Atlantic City. The hotel was like a morgue. The biased ravings of sports writers in the newspapers and the wishful thinking of millions of others convinced every one that Jim Jeffries would "kill that nigger" and thus restore pugilistic superiority to the white race.

So certain of this was the management of the hotel that elaborate preparations had been made to take care of an overflow and free-spending crowd.

Jeffries lost. The people did not come. There were small parties here and there. But they were but specks on the vast floor.

Lillian Russell came in. She came to the balcony where I was stationed. She liked the balcony. From her seat she could look down upon the floor below and view the antics of the patrons.

Also, she sat just above the bandstand and could better hear the music, both instrumental and vocal.

The patrons were in an ugly mood. Their hostility grew out of disappointment and disillusionment. Jeffries had let the whole white race down. He had "let that nigger beat him up."

In their anger, they would take it out on the waiters by calling us ugly, profane and degrading names. We could, in a way, always get back at them. We could spit in their soup or in their beer. This was sometimes done. But this was but a vicarious triumph. They would never know of our repulsive act.

The waiters were no more amiable. From a hilarious and

reckless crowd, we had expected to make a killing, or to "get out of the barrel," as the expression went among us.

The Islesworth was not in the strictest sense a hotel. True, there were rooms for guests. Also, there was a dining room. But it was best known as the Islesworth Cabaret.

It was an enormous place, almost a block long, with a balcony entirely around it. It was operated without any business ethics. Ownership, management and the workers were all out to get the patrons. Even if caught in a dishonest act, a waiter ran no great risk of retaliation. The waiter must buy his job. He paid 25 cents for a towel. This towel permitted him to go on the floor.

All of the money from towel purchases went to Johnny Johnson, the headwaiter, a very handsome Negro. Management knew this. No waiter would dare challenge the practice. Not alone were we being exploited, but we were also paying for the privilege of exploitation, thus enriching management by our labor. Add to this the humiliation we suffered from rude or half-drunk guests who called us degrading names because of our color. Rebellion to this caused us to begin to think of ways to get even the very minute we stepped on the floor.

Among Islesworth Cabaret waiters honesty was not the best policy — it was a fatal policy. No waiter trusted another. The reason was obvious. If he himself did not steal, he would squeal on the one who did. If one was too dumb to learn the tricks of the trade, he would be schooled. If he was too honest, ways would be found to get rid of him.

Waiters learned very quickly to spot the "loudmouth" or "four-flusher" who must always pay the check. He never bothered to detail the items for the correctness of the total. To make a mistake in the addition of his check was always tempting and involved no risks whatever. He simply paid and then, at a grandiose moment when he felt all attention was focused on him, he passed the waiter a tip with some corny joke like, "Here, George, buy yourself the Brooklyn Bridge."

Each waiter paid out of his own pocket for food or for drinks when he got them. Thus by collusion with the checker, it was easy to kite the price of a plank steak or lobster newburg. And every waiter had sufficient sense to add a couple packs of cigarettes or an extra highball to a check.

Being a waiter in the Islesworth on a busy night was just the same as being in a jungle. The hotel was short of everything: silver, glasses, china, even trays on which to carry the orders. Waiters

stole these articles from one another, if pressed for the need of them. One had no compunctions if he picked up the silver before a waiting patron, if he already had the order for his own guests on a tray on the side table, but with no silver for them.

Some old waiters were such masters of the trade that they bought themselves a quart of bourbon, stole a little decanter from the bar, and made highballs — never paying the house a cent.

Fights, sometimes very fierce, were the outgrowth of our stealing from one another. One Saturday night, when guests were so thick that one could scarcely move between the tables, I was in the bar. I had paid for my drinks and set them aside. It would take me but a minute to run into the kitchen which was next door, to ask when a plank steak I had ordered would be ready.

I was away but a minute. When I hurried through the door, I saw a guy unloading my tray. He was a fellow, about 6 feet two inches, with broad, square shoulders. Not one pound of excess weight did he carry. I yelled, "Hey, what the hell are you doing? Get off that tray."

Then I grew stone-cold with fright. I recognized him as a man known as "Shotgun" Williams. "Shotgun" was an old hotel man. He had worked in every hotel from the Royal Poinciana in Palm Beach to the Congress in Saratoga. He was known as a terrible fellow. Stories of the men and women he had shot or sliced with a razor or carving knife were numerous. But at the moment, none of this fazed me. I was being robbed. I walked right up to him, made a gesture toward my hind pocket and blurted loudly right into his teeth, "I'll cut your throat if you don't put my stuff back on that tray."

So burning was my fury that I never thought of the possible result of my threat.

To my utter surprise and that of the little circle of lookers-on, Shotgun stepped back from me and said, "Know one thing, little nigger, I believe you really would cut me."

"Damn tootin' I would," I scowled back.

TALE 43

I was walking on Arctic Avenue on my way home from work. I crossed New York Avenue and stepped up on the curb. Suddenly from in back of me came a voice: "Hello, Red Ashby," I turned my head. A girl was approaching. I could not immediately tell who she was. As she came nearer in the light of the lamp suspended above, I recognized her.

"Hello, Cora Davis," I exclaimed. Cora was a girl who had grown up in the village of Oxford, Pa., at Lincoln University. She had gone to the city to work two years before. She was quite dark. Her bust was somewhat large, and her hips were a bit heavy. Her features were Egyptian. Indeed, it was easy to imagine that she had just stepped off a panel in the tomb of Amenhotep. Anna Sewell, the author of "Black Beauty," might quite well have been writing about Cora Davis instead of a horse.

We exchanged a few words; then Cora asked me where I was going.

Quickly I said, "Let's go slummin'." We went.

Everything in that cabaret — size, contour, chairs, tables, piano, even the floor — is as vivid to me now as if I were still sitting in the place looking at it. But here memory fails. Neither the name of the place, nor the street that it was on, will come back to me.

Cora took a highball; I, a bottle of beer — the taste of which I detest. We watched the floor show for a while and had a couple of dances. Cora said, "It's 11 o'clock. I have to get up in the morning to go to work. I'm going home."

At the gate of her house, she hesitated. She went up on the porch and looked in the window of the front room. She waved me to follow her.

I spent a very pleasant and exciting night in bed with Cora.

I knew that Cora's privileges from her landlady did not include that of having gentlemen friends spend the night with her in her room. I arose early the next morning in order to get out of the house before the landlady knew.

We were in a room on the second floor in the back of the house. There was a shed in the back, the roof of which was covered with corrugated tin. It came up to Cora's window.

I crawled through the window, and with my shoes off, walked to the edge of the roof. The height from the ground was perhaps eight or ten feet.

I was about to jump to the ground when a man in the rear of a house on the next street hollered, "Hey, what are you doin' in that woman's house?"

TALE 44

Lincoln University students who worked in Atlantic City during the summer performed one nobly chivalrous act. We gave a dance for the girls from Philadelphia and Baltimore who were visiting the resort. This gesture was our demonstrable response to the social courtesies the girls afforded us in winter if we had the good fortune to get into town. The dance always was held on the Friday night before Labor Day. We would each chip in, rent Ben Fitzgerald's dance hall on Kentucky Avenue, and hire a piano player.

Came the night of the dance. That day I had bought a new suit and new shoes. It was smart to wait until late in August to buy clothing in Atlantic City. At that time, all merchants reduced prices drastically. They knew that anything not sold before Labor Day had to be carried over to next spring.

It does not embarrass me to confess that at 21, while not the homeliest young man alive, I would not, on the other hand, ever be taken for a Greek god. Indeed my physical appearance was perfectly described by a classmate, Jake Batey. One day after lunch we were standing before Cresson Hall bantering each other. Jake looked at me and said, "Know one thing, Bill: You'd be a damned good looking guy if they'd cut your head off."

I was having a hell of a good time. A waltz, the two-step, even a schottische - I did very well. I knew and sang all the latest tunes. This, combined with a quick and sometimes witty tongue, made me quite popular with the girls.

I was whirling around the floor, a wide smile on my face, when I noticed the girls staring at me. Jean Norwood circled near me and asked, "How you feel, Red?"

My response was immediate. I yelled out "Fine" loud enough to be heard 20 feet away.

Not long after, another came by and inquired, "Are you all right, Red?" I did not put one and one together. It pleased me that they were so solicitous of my health. Their inquiries must have been simple courtesies. One always inquires after another's health when a period in which they have not met goes by.

It was not until I saw several of them huddled together, looking directly at me and whispering, that I became conscious of their concern.

It was near the end of the evening when their anxiety about me leaked out. They had decided that my health was broken and

that I had "gone into decline."

Labor Day night would be my last at the Islesworth. I could always figure that it would be a good night, since it was the last fling for the merry-makers.

Ordinarily, I would have packed up the next day after Labor Day and left Atlantic City. But a commitment held me.

I always had two jobs. During the day, I worked as a waiter in the New England Hotel, an American plan hostelry. It, like most places, closed the day after Labor Day.

There was a party of four special guests of the hotel who had booked themselves to stay until the middle of September. They requested Mr. Brown, the headwaiter, to assign me to them as their waiter. I jumped at the chance. It meant an additional \$20 to \$25 for me.

Tuesday morning after breakfast, I was taking a bath and happened to turn my head toward the mirror. So great was my shock, that I stuttered, "God, I've gone away to nothing."

The bones of my arms, my shoulder blades, my ribs were so pronounced that I could count them. The combination of work in the New England in the day, and sometimes until three o'clock in the morning at Islesworth, had stripped me to skin and bones.

I jumped out of the tub, dressed and hastened to see Mr. Brown. I told him I had received a message there was illness in my family and I must go home. I asked him if he would get my pay ready for me as quickly as possible. I raced back to my room and packed my bag.

It was about four o'clock that afternoon when I reached Roselle. Mama and sister Lucy were glad to see me. Mama was immediately observant. "Sonny, you don't look good. Have you been sick?"

Mama and sister Lucy huddled together in another room. I could not hear all that they said. But I knew I was the subject of the conference. I heard the word "consumption."

That was it. They had made a complete diagnosis and arrived at a conclusion: "I had consumption."

Mama came to me and advised me to get on the train right away and go out to Lincoln University and rest.

I left, terribly bewildered. I had never questioned life before. There had been no need. I had never had a crisis such as this. Now, I asked questions. "It isn't fair," I convinced myself. "Why must I suffer this cruelty? I have worked hard day and night to educate and improve myself. It is now within my grasp. I am a

senior now. But I shall die of consumption before I realize the fruits of my labor."

That summer, especially, knowing that I must earn as much as possible for my graduation, I pushed myself. All summer, I had had but two nights of pleasure, the one in bed with Cora Davis, and the other at the dance for the girls. In a moment of revenge to get even for all the deprivations which I had undergone, I screamed out with abandon: "Damn if I'll die in a corner, waiting for an undertaker to come and measure me for the box. I'm going to have myself one hell of a time. I'm going to have some fun."

That night I went to Diggs' Cabaret, a place on 37th Street, near Eighth Avenue. I met lots of students, many of whom I knew, whose jobs had come to an end. There were boys from Howard University, Hampton Institute, Virginia Union in Richmond, and Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C. It was student custom to gather in New York at the season's end for a rousing time before going back to school. I threw dimes and quarters on the floor for the female entertainers. I danced with girls who had been sitting at tables, eagerly waiting for male companionship; I fended off prostitutes and wise guys who regarded all students as suckers who could easily be taken in.

The next afternoon, I went to Harlem. I was in the Big Apple, a place on the corner of 135th Street and Seventh Avenue. There were perhaps a dozen men standing or sitting around. Bert Williams, the celebrated comedian, came in. Immediately, all paid to him the obeisance rightfully accorded to one in high places. Some who knew him well even greeted him with the familiarity, "Hello, Bert." He lived across the street on Seventh Avenue, just opposite the Big Apple.

In his hand, he carried a tin pail. At the farthest end of the bar was a large pan of hot baked beans, a pan of cornbread, a pan of hot home-cooked rolls, a platter of sliced cheese, and a pan with a large spiced ham.

Bert Williams went to the cook and, in his deep rich voice which could be heard all over the room, said: "Put me two orders of beans and ham in this bucket."

Only a few days before, I had read that Bert Williams had been the headliner at the Palace Theater for two weeks, and was paid \$3,000 a week. "What," I thought to myself, "would a man commanding \$3,000 a week be doing ordering ham and beans in a place like the Big Apple?"

That night I went to Barron Wilkens, a rather high-class place a

few blocks down from the Big Apple on Seventh Avenue, at about 132nd Street. I repeated the things I had done at Diggs' the night before.

On Thursday about noon, I left for Philadelphia. I wanted to see the girls and prove to them that even if I had "gone into decline," I was not yet dead.

I had the good fortune of seeing Bessie Westpetal and Judy Holland. By Friday I was completely done in from sheer exhaustion. I went to the Market Street Station and got on the train for Lincoln University.

It was about 2:30 when I got off the train at Lincoln.

I knew that the refectory of the school would not yet be open. I stopped at a little store in the village and bought sardines, yellow cheese and soda crackers. I went to my room. I must have fallen asleep even as I tried to get into bed, for I do not remember a single thing connected with the act of undressing.

When I awoke, it looked like dusk outside. I got up and went to the window. Walking between Ashmun Hall and Cresson Hall was a student I recognized. He was Zokufa, an African.

"Hey Zokufa," I called down, "What time is it?"

"It ees seex o'clock."

"Six o'clock! Where are you going at six o'clock in the morning?"

"It ees seex o'clock at night."

I had slept for almost 30 hours.

TALE 45

I graduated. What now? In 1911, what does a Negro male, approaching 22, do with a bachelor of arts degree from a Negro college? The avenues open to me were very few and rigidly prescribed. I could get a position as a teacher. That would mean that I had to go into the deep South. I could continue my education and become a minister, lawyer or doctor.

Mama wanted me to become a doctor. I could never get up the courage to tell her pointedly "No." But I always knew that it could never be.

Even now, I recoil so violently against the sight of blood that if I spot a dog or cat on the street or highway that has been struck by a speeding automobile, I cup my face in my hands and hide my eyes until I am sure I have passed it.

I had thought that I might become a lawyer. But one day after I had returned from working Easter Week in Atlantic City, I went with my roommate, Leon Bivins, to a courtroom in the Municipal Building in Philadelphia. A prisoner was on the stand testifying against the crime for which he had been incarcerated. I believed what he said. I believed him innocent. But then a man arose - the prosecutor, I assumed - and expostulated loudly and passionately about the heinousness of this man's crime, adding that the people of this fair city must be protected against such vicious and rapacious men. He wound up by demanding that the prisoner be punished to the full extent of the law.

The judge - there was no jury - said that the man must be jailed for three years.

That finished me with law. How could I ever ask that a man's liberty be taken away for an alleged offense when my conscience told me that he was innocent?

The last, the only opportunity of employment left open to me was to go back into a hotel or restaurant as a waiter.

I got a job as a waiter in the catering establishment of W. B. Day and Son, on Broad Street in Newark.

TALE 46

One night I went to a dance in Plainfield, N. J. As I entered the dance hall on the second floor of the building, there glided past me a sylph, a sprite. She was dressed in blue and wore high-button shoes. Her dark brown hair fell loosely over her shoulders, and ended almost at her waist. She laughed. It had all the happiness of the song of a lark at the first rays of daylight.

I met her. Her name was Mary Arnold and she was from Hopewell, N.J.

She has been with me ever since.

TALE 47

I felt a contemptible disgust for myself. I was a disappointment to myself, a disappointment to Mama, a disappointment to lots of people who knew that I ought to do better.

A college degree, and still a waiter. I needed no college degree to be a waiter. I had worked with hundreds of waiters. Some of the best of them could neither read nor write. But with all of my learning, I had not risen one inch above them. I knew that I must do something. What?

One day sauntering along Market Street, I saw a placard in a window. In heavy letters across the top was the name "Eugene V. Debs." It said Debs would speak at the Labor Lyceum on Springfield Avenue. My decision to hear him was immediate. I had read something about Debs, enough to make me believe that I ought to hear.

The man completely captivated me.

I was caught up in his words as he railed against the coal barons, steel barons, ship-owning barons, railroad barons, for their persecution and exploitation of poor and unorganized working men. This I understood thoroughly.

Debs changed his mood. He spoke of brotherhood. He made a passionate plea for man to serve his fellow man.

"There," I thought, "I will devote my life to the services of my fellow men. I will be a foreign missionary. I will go to Africa and convert all the heathen."

But I still did not know what to do; which way to turn.

I wrote to Yale University School of Religion for a catalogue. In it was a course which read something like the things about which Debs spoke, and which I thought I could do and ought to do.

TALE 48

Mama became ill. Today, physicians with their unbelievable knowledge of the human anatomy would diagnose her malady as cancer. In Mama's day, doctors possessed no such wisdom. They called her sickness complications and debility of old age — she was 58.

She still lived with brother Tom in Roselle. She divined that her illness was incurable. She wanted to go back to Virginia to die.

We sent her to brother John, who was now a minister, pastor of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia.

One day as I was removing soiled dishes from the table at Day's, the bookkeeper called out: "Ashby, telegram for you."

"I know," I answered. "Mama is dead."

Her funeral was at the First Baptist Church in Newport News. I am sure that Mama is buried in a graveyard located near the Shell Road, half-way between Newport News and Hampton.

TALE 49

Dean Charles R. Brown of the Yale School of Religion was a lovely man – kind, sympathetic, inspiring. Mrs. Brown was the very essence of a gracious hostess.

Dean and Mrs. Brown invited the new students to spend an evening with them in their home. I went into their dining room. I sat on their chairs. We talked. We laughed. I sat at their dining table. I ate their food. They served me. I used their china, silver, napkins, glassware. Always before, I had been the servant of white people.

• This was shocking, astounding, a drastic revolution in life as I knew it. I had sat at the table with white people and dined with them. Had I been suddenly boosted into an indefinable, chaotic, amorphous something that they called “social equality”?

Out of that experience, how did I, approaching 25, differ in my relations with whites from every other Negro approaching 25 in the year 1914?

TALE 50

The football team of Brown University came down from Providence to play Yale’s team at Yale Field.

On Brown’s team was one Fritz Pollard. The sports writer of the New York Tribune, in each edition of the week of the game, wrote about Brown’s team and Pollard. He described him as a “burly Negro.”

On the day of the game, I went with Aiken Pope, Nimrod Allen, J. Anderson, Charlie Tribbett, Early Caples and Francis Williams and stood in front of the Yale Gym on Elm Street where the Brown team was quartered. Our aim was to see Pollard and give him such support and encouragement as we could.

A fellow came out of the door of the gym and walked toward us on the sidewalk. He was small, brown-skinned, and with the easiest smile one could imagine. Brainwashed by the articles in the Tribune about the size of the man, we expected to see a fellow at least 6 feet, 2 inches, and weighing 210 pounds.

I asked, “Did Fritz Pollard come with the team?”

He hesitated a moment. Then he said, “I’m Fritz Pollard.”

This couldn’t be, it simply couldn’t! This fellow at most could not weigh more than 145 pounds. Our shock was beyond words. The fellow had lied. He was playing a trick on us.

On our way out to the Yale Field we were depressed, literally and honestly scared to death. We knew the size of the men on the Yale line. They would murder this little man.

We went on the Brown side of the field, wanting to give Pollard as much moral support as possible, but also because we knew that there would be animosity toward us in the Yale stands. We would be baited with the foulest and vilest epithets hurled right into our teeth, and we could do nothing about it.

Fritz Pollard mastered to a degree one of the essentials of football seldom ever equalled and never surpassed by any other halfback. It was that of handling a punt. So deep was his confidence in himself to catch the ball, that he played very deep. The moment the ball was kicked, he took off at full speed as does a centerfielder after a short fly. When he caught the ball, he was going as fast as he would ever go. Therefore, unless the opponent grabbed him the moment the ball was caught, there was no way to stop him short of a gain.

The ball was kicked to him. He began to circle toward the right sideline. The Yale stands arose and screamed: "Catch that nigger! Kill that nigger!"

I jumped up and hollered: "Run, nigger, run! Go, Fritz, go!"

Sheldon, the left tackle on the Yale team, a big fellow from Atlanta, Ga., took out for him on a lateral course. Bingham, the quarterback, was coming up in a burst of speed from his deep safety position. They would make a pincer tackle on Pollard. They would murder the boy.

Pollard kept running. As he got to the sideline, he jumped off the field, and landed straight up on the Yale bench.

Sheldon and Bingham had left their feet simultaneously for a flying tackle. They grabbed at a slick Pollard who was not there. They collided. A stretcher was brought out to take them off the field.

I was in the gym after the game, hoping to shake Pollard's hand.

Sheldon burst in. "Where is he? Where is he?" he was calling. "Pollard, where are you?"

Pollard, having taken his shower, stepped out of a cage in which he was dressing.

"You're a nigger, but you're the best goddam football player I ever saw," blurted out Sheldon, thrusting out his hand to Pollard.

TALE 51

My first year completed, I went to work for the summer at Tappin's Inn, at Sheepshead Bay in New York. It was a very famous shore dinner place — indeed, the most famous on the Atlantic Coast. It was a rambling, one-story frame house, sitting flat on the ground,

just across from the inlet. It was owned and operated by Jim Villepeque, a giant of a man — easily 350 pounds. There was no telling where his head left off and his neck began. On top of his huge head, he always wore a cap that was too small. It was the original bump on a log.

He always sat at a door between the kitchen and the dining room, and each waiter reaching him had to lower his tray before him for his personal inspection. He walked always very slowly, with a large cane the size of a sapling.

On one side of the building, in full view of the patrons who sat at the tables, was a garden, perhaps a hundred feet long. In it was planted golden bantam corn. At the end of the garden was a "chicken house," with a couple dozen fowl strutting about the yard.

One of the most delicious items in the dinner was the entree. It consisted of a half broiled spring chicken, topped with a slice of genuine Smithfield (not Virginia) ham, and golden bantam corn on the cob. Almost always came words of praise for the tastiness of the food.

I would pass Mr. Villepeque and say, "Boss, (everybody called him Boss) Mr. So-and-So says that that's the best chicken and corn he ever ate."

"Did you show him out the window my farm and chicken house, and tell him I raise everything fresh right on these grounds?"

We really did often tell patrons to look through the window at the corn and fowl, and tell them that all the food served in Tappin's Inn was home-grown and home-raised. Some of the fools were gullible enough to believe our white lies, and swallow the stuff hook, line and sinker.

Few places could equal it for celebrated patrons. For any Wednesday, Saturday, or Sunday dinner, one might see Diamond Jim Brady, a couple of Goulds, a couple of Vanderbilts, Jack Norworth, Nora Bayes, Mayor John F. Hylan, Jim Corbett, Gus Edwards, Tom Sharkey, Sam Gompers, Congressman Nicholas Longworth, Blanche Ring, Frank D. Waterman.

Lee Smith was the headwaiter. Lee was the most impeccable man I have ever seen. No matter how clean and fresh you thought you were, you always felt dirty standing next to him. Also, he was one of the most nearly perfect persons that I have ever seen in the execution of the job which he was hired to do. He was Napoleonic in size, a fact of which he was conscious, but that made no difference. His manner as he met guests at the door, and the respect and loyalty which he commanded from all who worked under him, removed all

doubt as to who was the head man. He was from Farmville, Va., and probably never went above sixth grade in school. But early in his life he had decided that hotels offered the best — perhaps the only — avenue for steady employment. He would master the whole thing.

He could step behind the bar and mix any drink, no matter how exotic. He could go into the kitchen and be a match with any chef.

Fortunately for me he quickly took a liking to me. Sometimes, even when dinner was over, if a late party came in he would bring them to my tables. If I remonstrated by saying, "Chief, this was my long day on watch; I'm tired," he would step a little away from me and chide almost in a fatherly manner: "School boy, ain't you? Told me you had to make money to go to college. Go 'head and feed them people." He then walked away in a laughing triumph.

An orchestra of four pieces furnished the entertainment. Happy Rhone was the song-and-dance man. He had one feature in which every guest took part. He had a song which he called the "Grasshopper." Old patrons of Tappin's Inn knew the song as well as Happy himself. It was as much a part of an evening at Tappin's as the food. At some point one of the guests would begin to call out for the "Grasshopper" song. Vigorous hand-clapping and cheering followed, and the performance was on.

Happy would start the song — "One grasshopper jumped right over the other grasshopper's back" — and begin to move down an aisle.

Immediately a guest would jump up and follow, putting his hands on Happy's sides. This followed as he continued, "One grasshopper jumped right over the other grasshopper's back, and the other grasshopper jumped right over the other grasshopper's back."

Even before he reached the end of the first aisle, almost the whole room were on their feet, their hands gripping each other's sides, and singing jubilantly and fervently about a jumping grasshopper.

TALE 52

A course on Shakespeare was being offered to sophomores in Yale College. Yale curriculum-makers had very wisely made it possible for a student in one college to take a course in another college, providing the deans of the two schools are convinced that the progress of the student will not be inhibited by extra work.

I wanted to take this course on Shakespeare. I obtained consent

of my dean. In the class, I was never to be more than an onlooker. I could take the assignments, but I would not be expected to ask or answer questions; nor need I take the tests that were given.

Professor Brooks, the teacher, had the somewhat disturbing and irritating habit of walking from one point to another as he talked. Standing near me, he said: "Let us imagine a scene something like this. Brabantio and friends were gathered at his home. All of them knew about Othello. Brabantio was deeply concerned about the fate of his daughter, Desdemona. Othello had not won her love fairly. He was a black man, a foreigner. He had captivated her by tricks, bewitched her by incantations, conquered my darling weak daughter by his eloquent boasts and thrilling tales of battles he had fought, and conquests he had made. 'He has cast a spell over my daughter. That nigger wants to marry my daughter. I ask you, gentlemen, how would you feel if a nigger asked for the hand of your daughter? I am a Senator of Venice. This Moor seeks social equality with me. I call upon my friends, my attendants, to lynch this nigger.' "

I sat through this scene which Professor Brooks had delineated to these adolescent students. I noticed that one or two of them glanced at me and snickered.

TALE 53

Dr. Booker T. Washington was coming to New Haven to lecture in Woolsey Hall. It would be a rather select and preferred audience.

Mr. Holland was the headwaiter in the Student Union, the dining hall. He was afraid that the colored people would not have the chance to get into the hall and hear Dr. Washington.

I worked in the dining room. For my services, I received my meals. They were almost always terrible, sometimes hardly more than "slop," served to us in the help's dining room in the basement of the building. I have eaten parsnips in every way in which they can be cooked. Sometimes I was faced with parsnips, a slice of bread, and coffee for breakfast.

Mr. Holland confided his concern to me. I understood, but I had no solution. He suggested that Dr. Washington might respond favorably to an invitation from the Negro students. I was but lukewarm to the suggestion. Where would we hold such a meeting? Also, even if we had it, would it not be entirely run by the students with the townspeople still left without any real participation?

I knew that it was Dr. Washington's custom, after he had appeared before a white audience, to go to a Negro church or

fraternal hall where he could speak face-to-face with his people.

I suggested to Mr. Holland that his church, the Dixwell Avenue African Methodist Episcopal (AME), invite Dr. Washington to come to them after his Woolsey Hall address. My suggestion pleased him. He then told me that I must write the letter. I agreed, but told him that he and the officers of the church should sign it.

When Dr. Washington came out of Woolsey Hall by a side door, Mr. Holland and I were waiting for him in a horse and carriage.

We drove him to the Dixwell Avenue AME Church.

All records claim that the last public appearance made by Dr. Washington was before that select audience in Woolsey Hall.

But I know that his last public appearance was before a Negro audience in the Dixwell Avenue AME Church. I was there.

TALE 54

There was a lot of talk going on among us about the organization of a chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, a Greek-letter fraternity among Negroes. I took little or no part in the discussion.

Always, I think, I have had a strong aversion to any sort of organization based on selectivity or exclusiveness, which said that one person could belong, but another could not — a congregation of snobs or bigots. Were I a member of such a fraternity, I would have to blackball someone and keep him out, and I would never know why.

Without being told, I was designated vice-president of the group. I was hooked. I could find no reason which the other fellows would accept to help me to wriggle out of this unsolicited appointment.

In all departments at Yale at that time — the college, Sheffield School, Law and the School of Religion — there were about 16 black students. Because of the diversity of the hours at which our classes were held, it was found that the only time that we could all get together was 6:30 in the morning. We got together for a picture of the chapter, the Yale University Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

In the chapter were Beal Elliott, Joe Allen, Dr. Fleming, Wayman Ward, Emory Smith, P. F. Johnson, Clement MacNeal, Charlie Tribbett, Bill Ashby, Father Bowles, W. N. Bishop, Nimrod Allen, Aiken Pope, John Williams, J. W. Anderson.

I do not know how I came by it, but for more than 50 years I had kept that picture. I gave it to Yale in 1970.

TALE 55

Eugene Davidson of Harvard was the 143-pound wrestling champion. Gene came down to Yale for a match in his weight with a Yale man.

He came by my room. I lived on the first floor of Taylor Hall, just across the Green from the post office.

He asked me to go with him. I wished him luck but declined his invitation to go to the match in the gym.

Gene came back to my room beaming. He had won. Some of the fellows had come to my room to await the news of the outcome of the contest. We were all very happy. He stayed with us until time to catch a midnight train for Boston.

Among us was a student named Clement MacNeal. Mac was from New Orleans. He spoke classic French and the Creole patois with equal facility. He was a very good looking fellow, his skin somewhat swarthy, like that of an Italian from middle Italy. He was always a Negro, except when an occasion arose when it was to his advantage to be white.

Mac worked in a freshman dining room. At lunch the next day after Eugene Davidson's wrestling match, he was on his job.

A student came in. Laughing, he said, "Did you hear what they did to that nigger last night?"

Mac's ears perked up.

"Well, our boy was enraged because he had to wrestle a nigger. He said to the coach, 'If you make me wrestle that nigger with his arms around me, I'll disgrace Yale! I'll kill him!'" So the coach went downtown to one of the athletic clubs, found a guy of the same weight, dressed him in our togs, and sent him out to wrestle the nigger. The nigger — ha! ha! — thinks that he had beaten a Yale man."

TALE 56

I wrote a novel. It was entitled "Redder Blood," published by the Cosmopolitan Press of New York, a firm now extinct. It was one of the first pieces of fiction on miscegenation, written by a Negro. James Weldon Johnson, the distinguished poet and diplomat, appraised it as the best work yet done on that subject. Yet nowhere does it appear in the list of Negro works. I do not believe that it is even in the Schomburg Collection of the New York Library on 135th Street. That is strange, since I know that it was widely read by students in all of the Negro schools.

TALE 57

Dr. James E. Shepard, principal of the National Training School in Durham, North Carolina, offered me a position to teach English in his institution. I accepted.

TALE 58

War was declared. There was a mad scramble by the military to secure young men with sufficient scholastic proficiency to qualify as officers to lead the millions of troops that would be needed for duty overseas. I was immediately singled out.

The Southeastern Area Military Corps (I am not sure that this is the right designation. I care so little about everything military that even until now I do not know the difference between the insignia of a five-star general and a one-day corporal, and I can think of nothing so absolutely asinine and pointless as a full-grown man, dressed in a monkey military suit, running across the earth, his gun thrust forward, bent on killing a man of whom he has never heard and certainly never seen before) had its headquarters in Spartanburg, S.C., I think.

My name was sent to the commander there. The response was immediate. He directed that I, along with any other possible candidates, meet him Sunday afternoon.

Dr. Shepard was delighted that a member of his faculty had been so highly honored. He conveyed his delight to Dr. A. H. Moore, W. G. Pearson, Charles C. Spaulding, Mr. Avery and John Merrick, the founder and president of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Co. All of these men puffed out their chests, too, over the distinction which had come to one of their own.

The meeting was held in the home of Mr. Merrick.

The commander grilled me rather stiffly. My answers must have been reasonably intelligent, for he gave me a very high rating, and advised me to be ready on the spur of the moment. Papers of my confirmation would be forwarded to me as soon as he returned to headquarters.

Negro candidates for officer training would all be sent to Fort Des Moines, a segregated camp in Iowa.

Mary was overwrought at my selection. In tears, she broke out: "You have been away from us all the time at school. Now you are going off to war. You will be killed. I'm going to take Kathryn and I'm going home to Mama. Go where you want. I don't care if you never come back."

A week or 10 days went by. My confirmation papers did not come. I sent Mary and Kathryn to Mary's mother, who lived at 27 Broad St. in Hopewell, N.J.

I waited. Nothing happened. No papers came. I wrote the commander and told him something dreadful had happened. I had to leave Durham.

I went to Hopewell. Here again was the matter of a job. The Reading Railroad was building a second track all the way from Philadelphia to New York, in order to facilitate the moving of troops and materiel for the war. A labor scout came to the house and asked me if I wanted to work. I jumped at the chance, rejoicing that good fortune had come so quickly and unexpectedly.

A foreman gave me a hammer and told me to drive spikes in a tie. I seized it with gusto. It took me but a few minutes to make a great discovery. Not only was my aim terrible, but also, I lacked the strength to swing an eight or ten-pound sledge hammer. The foreman made me a water boy. With pail in each hand, I had to carry water a distance of perhaps two or three blocks, to men strung along the rail. This, I knew, was too much for me.

I wrote to Lee Smith under whom I had worked at Tapin's in Sheepshead Bay. Lee wrote me back right away. He told me that he was taking over the headwaitership of the grill room at Hotel Champlain in Bluff Point, N.Y. He told me the place where the crew would assemble, and the time and date we would leave New York for Bluff Point.

TALE 59

In 1917, I went to New York to the offices of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, located at 2307 7th Ave. I conferred with John T. Clark, industrial secretary of the league. The interview went on for quite some time.

I told him of my training in social science at Yale. He rose and left the room. In a little while, he returned and beckoned me to follow him. "I want you to meet Mr. Eugene Kinckle Jones, our executive director," he said.

We went to a room on the second floor. "Mr. Jones, this is Mr. Ashby. I think we might use him somewhere in our program."

Jones recognized me. We had met at a student conference while I was still in school.

Jones remarked that hundreds of thousands of Negroes were pouring into the cities of the North to work in industrial plants, committed to the production of materials for the war. They

created a multiplicity of problems which were new, and with which no cities had the knowledge to deal.

The Urban League at that time was the only organization whose purpose and aim might give direction to the solution of some of the problems. Consequently, applications were coming in very rapidly from various cities, anxious to set up branches of the league.

One of the cities was Newark. Jones said, "I understand that you have lived in Newark. That could be a great advantage to you. I will, therefore, be glad to recommend your name to the board of directors of the Newark organization."

I could hardly contain my satisfaction.

He added that the organization contemplated beginning its activities not later than Sept. 1.

I told him I had a job for the summer. He advised me to report for my job and he would inform me of the decision of the board in Newark.

TALE 60

Camp Plattsburgh was for the sons of the rich only. It was strictly Ivy League: Harvard, Yale, Princeton. The name bandied about by everybody was Teddy Roosevelt, Jr.

General Leonard Wood was coming to inspect the camp. A social evening must be held to honor him on Saturday night after his military duties. Hotel Champlain was but five or six miles from the camp, the ideal place for the affair.

A dance would be held on the lawn of the hotel. It would be necessary to lay a floor for the dancing. The orchestra could play from a point on the balcony that almost surrounded the building.

It was 5 o'clock Sunday morning before we finished sweeping the dance floor, picking up wine and beer bottles, cigar and cigarette butts, and half-eaten food.

We had to be back in the dining room to serve breakfast at 8:30. Not many people came to breakfast. They had been out too late the night before.

At dinner, the place was a madhouse. People were so thick that waiters had difficulty worming their ways through them. There were no reservations for tables. They just stood everywhere, waiting to jump into the first chair that was empty. They were hungry. Their mood was ugly. One of my tables for six had nine crowded to it. They picked up the menu. I told them to forget about ordering

separately. The kitchen was piled with orders.

They'd have to wait two hours. I told them that I'd bring them all roast beef, baked potato and cauliflower. They gave a hurrah, and said "bring it on!"

Next to me was a table for six at which eight had seated themselves. The waiter was named Crooks. Among those at the table, and the one having most to say, was a Mr. Goelet. He was from somewhere in Rhode Island. His family had great financial interest in the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. The railroad in turn owned the Champlain Hotel. Mr. Goelet was very impatient. He banged on the table. He bawled: "I want some service!"

Crooks told him that there were people before him, that he was working as fast as he could, that he would have to wait his turn. He was at his side table, picking up food to serve another table.

Mr. Goelet hollered, "Here, nigger, do you know who I am? Serve me this instant or I'll see that you are fired."

In the bat of an eye, Crooks turned. Fair of skin, he was the color of a beet. He placed his left foot firmly on the bottom rung of the chair on which Mr. Goelet sat, and pinned him to the table. He grabbed a water bottle from the center of the table and raised it over Mr. Goelet's head. "Take it back! Take it back! I'll split your goddam head open! Take it back! Take it back, you mother-fucking son-of-a-bitch."

Pandemonium reigned. Men and women jumped from their seats and ran screaming out on the lawn, knocking over chairs and tables in their flight.

Sitting at the table was Ralph Bemeisler, the great All-American end on the Yale football team. So sudden was the action that he was completely immobilized.

Crooks' lips were trembling as he demanded an apology.

Lee Smith ran up, asking: "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Word had reached Mr. Adams, the hotel manager. He catapulted down the stairs from the main dining room above. "What's the matter here? What's the matter?" he demanded.

Mr. Goelet told him that his life had been threatened by this waiter.

"Do you know who this is?" asked Adams. "His family owns this hotel. Apologize to him, or get your coat and hat and get out."

"Apologize, hell," shouted Lee Smith. "My men have been working 24 hours. I don't work in no place where the guests have so little manners as they humiliate the help. Men, throw down your

trays. Let's go back to New York." We started out.

Mr. Adams in a frenzy called, "Lee! Lee! Where are you going? What are you doing? You can't leave us like that."

"The hell I can't. Come on, men."

"Please! Please! What do you want us to do?"

"Have Mr. Goelet apologize to Mr. Crooks in front of all those people."

TALE 61

I had been at Champlain perhaps about three weeks when I received a letter from Mr. Jones, telling me that I had been selected for the Newark post. He asked me if I could secure a release from my employer in order that I might come to New York and take an orientation course in preparation for my new job. I showed the letter to Lee Smith. He was visibly pleased over my selection. He had a sort of paternal interest in me, since he felt that in some way he had contributed to my education. I attest that he contributed mightily to it.

He shook my hand "goodbye" and wished me luck. In my hand, he left a Waterman fountain pen.

TALE 62

I had been at my job as the executive secretary of the Negro Welfare League of New Jersey — now the Urban League of Essex County — for about four weeks. A telephone call came from Miss Helen B. Pendleton, asking me to come to her office about 11:30 a.m. Miss Pendleton was one of that new group of rebellious white women who were graduating from the colleges in the first decades of the century. All of them more or less had been touched by the great humanitarianism and philosophy of being their "brother's keeper," of which Jane Addams was the symbol and which was so dynamically expressed by Hull House, Chicago.

Born in West Virginia, Miss Pendleton, after her graduation, cloaked in the zeal of her youth, went to South Carolina to work. There she observed the discrimination and persecution which everywhere were inflicted upon Negroes. She rebelled and spoke out against this. She was literally run out of South Carolina. She was now supervisor of casework in the Newark Bureau of Associated Charities. Their offices were located in a two-story brownstone building on the corner of Halsey Street and Central Avenue. She had been very active in the organization of the Urban League, and her vast experience, courage, and enthusiasm hastened its coming into being.

Miss Pendleton wanted to take me and introduce me to a well-known philanthropist from whom it was hoped I might obtain a sizable donation for the league.

We boarded a trolley car at Central Avenue and Broad Street and got off at Broad and Market streets.

At that time chivalry was not dead. A gentleman raised his hat when approaching a lady. A gentleman arose and gave a lady his seat on the trolley car. A gentleman assisted a lady when stepping off a curb. A gentleman always extended his strong hand to assist a lady getting out of a carriage, or stepping off a trolley car. All this I knew.

But so great was the belief in color superiority, that all over the land there prevailed the conviction that about the flesh of all white women was something sacrosanct and that, if that flesh were touched by a Negro, it would be contaminated.

I did not extend my hand to assist Miss Pendleton as she stepped off the trolley. When we reached the sidewalk, Miss Pendleton stopped suddenly.

Staring menacingly at me, she said, "Mr Ashby, you are not a gentleman. A gentleman would never permit a lady to step from a trolley without offering his arm to assist her."

Since that moment, I have treated all women with the same deference, no matter what the color of their skin, where they were born, who was their father, whether they weigh 240 pounds, or just 98.

TALE 63

Thousands of unattached young women flocked to Newark. They came mainly from rural areas of the South. They were not prepared to meet a single area of large city life. Of even so fundamental a thing as clothing, they were ignorant. They came in the deep of the winter in the thin cotton dresses worn in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama or Florida. If they had a topcoat at all, its texture was so loose the wintry winds of New Jersey whipped through.

But the moral temptations to these girls were the things which give us the most concern. Unlike the white girl, there was no Young Women's Christian Association to give shelter or provide advice. They simply stood out and alone without a buffer of any sort.

Mrs. Richard C. Jenkinson was a member of the executive board of the Negro Welfare League. She was of a family whose

roots were deep in New Jersey's history.

I discussed with her the possibility of purchasing a building which would provide a home and also wholesome recreation for at least some of the new young women.

Mrs. Jenkinson said, "I have a friend, a very wealthy friend. If we can interest her, it is very possible that a home for these girls can be purchased. I'll try to arrange an appointment for you."

This friend was Mrs. Felix Fuld. Mrs. Fuld was the wife of Felix Fuld. She was also the sister of Louis Bamberger. Bamberger, Fuld and Mrs. Fuld owned the L. Bamberger Co., one of the largest department stores in the country. Mrs. Fuld had an office on the seventh floor of the building. When her secretary showed me to her office door, I cannot say I was the calmest person in all the world. Luckily for me, she did not pry me with a multitude of questions. In obvious sympathy and sincerity, she said, "I know something about what you came to see me for. My dear friend, Mrs. Jenkinson, has told me something about you. I do not mind telling you that she spoke very highly of you. How much do you expect me to give you?"

From somewhere — I shall never know where — I said "\$500."

She pressed a button. Her secretary appeared at the door.

"Please tell Mr. Fuld to come here."

I do not know why I did not jump up and run out of the place with fright. I had said the wrong thing. I had asked for too much.

Fuld's office was but a few feet down the aisle. He came shortly. First introducing me to her husband, Mrs. Fuld added, "This gentleman wants me to give him \$500."

"Well, give him the \$500," he said. He turned and walked out of the room.

The abandon with which he sanctioned the gift simply mystified me. What kind of people were these? This was an enormous sum of money. Yet, Fuld spoke of it with less concern than I would putting a penny in a slot machine to get a stick of gum.

Mrs. Fuld said, "Mr. Ashby, I am so deeply moved by your problem that I will help you raise the money needed. It is time for me to go away for the summer, but I'll postpone that for a week or two."

We set the goal of \$10,000. Mrs. Fuld went out among her friends. I went to industries with which I had worked: Swift and Co.; Armour & Co.; J. H. Ladew; Butterworth and Judson.

In about 10 days or two weeks, we had raised between us in excess of \$8,000.

We purchased a four-story brick building at 58 W. Market Street for \$14,000. The first floor was for the office of the League. The three floors above were the dormitories and reception rooms for young women.

TALE 64

Paul Robeson came to Newark on several occasions while he was a student at Rutgers University. The Young Men's Christian Association was located on Halsey Street, and its director was Henry Cozzens. Twice each year, preferably spring and fall, there would be held in Newark a convocation of YMCA directors from a large area of the state. Not only the directors, but also many young men who were members of the organization were invited and came.

Mr. Cozzens presided over these meetings. He asked Paul to come and be the principal speaker and later to participate in one of the sessions. Concerned lest Paul might feel a degree of uneasiness (as the only Negro among the whites), Mr. Cozzens asked me to act as a sort of host for the young student. I leaped at the rare opportunity to be his temporary companion. I went to the old Market Street Pennsylvania Station and waited for his train from New Brunswick to pull in.

We greeted each other warmly and away we went, walking up Market Street toward the YMCA. It was an indescribable thrill for me and I was proud beyond expression to be a part of it. Just think of it: Paul Robeson, a young Negro, a student yet, being billed as the main speaker at a conference of all whites. I was really grateful and also had great praise for Mr. Cozzens. He was a true liberal. He had hopped over the boundaries of race. Paul conducted himself masterfully. As we walked back to Market Street Station I was almost overcome by a glow of pride and hope. Enough gestures like these, though only one at a time, and maybe — I dare not go beyond maybe — the gap of hate between white and Negro would become narrower and narrower. It is now 60 years later, and I look back at these occasions. In retrospect I interpret them in a very different light, and the values stand on different levels. Henry Cozzens was not a liberal. He was an exploiter. He exploited the talents of this young Negro. If Paul Robeson had walked off Halsey Street and gone to the clerk in the office of the YMCA and asked for a night's lodging, it would have been denied him.

TALE 65

Kathryn was four. She was visiting her grandmother, Mrs. Kate Arnold, in Hopewell. On Saturday, I went out to spend the weekend with her. "Come on, kid," I said, "I'll take you for a carriage ride."

I pushed her up as far as the Highland Cemetery.

On our return, when we were about a block from home, she said, "Take me out, Daddy, I want to walk."

We were now in front of the Dalrymple home, an elongated frame house, built in the colonial days on land that was a part of the king's grant to the town.

A caterpillar had just come off the grass and started across the flagstone sidewalk. "Oh, look at the worm, Daddy," she screamed.

I stepped on it. I crushed it flat on the stone.

Kathryn looked down at it. Its tiny black and yellow hairs were sticking up out of the goo which had been its body. Then she looked up at me. "Why did you kill that worm, Daddy? It hadn't done anything to you."

TALE 66

During World War I, I did not go into military service. But I did go into a civilian branch of the government which had an important bearing on the war effort.

There was set up in the U.S. Employment Service a unit which was designated Department of Negro Economics. It was directed by Dr. George E. Haynes, who had been a teacher of economics in Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.

He was also one of the founders of the National Urban League.

After his appointment in the employment service, he summoned me to join. I was to be the director of the New Jersey unit. The board of directors of the league gave me a leave of absence to fill the position. Generally, the purpose of the unit was to deal with problems of the Negro in civilian life, with particular emphasis on employment.

The employment service, the N.J. Department of Labor and the Newark Employment Office joined. We all worked out of a building in Franklin Street across from City Hall.

Specifically, my job was to cover the state and find new workers for war industries. Also, I was directed to persuade, where possible, workers in plants not related to the manufacture of products for the war, to switch and go into war plants.

A plant in Morgan was an export point for shells, dynamite and powder. They were terribly behind in the shipments of all

material. I was pressed to find more workers. The employment manager came to me in Newark. He literally begged for assistance.

I pointed out to him the difficulties in channeling workers to the factory. In the first place there was the danger. Disastrous explosions, taking many lives and maiming even more, had already occurred at the Hercules Plant, Picatinny Arsenal and Toms River. But even if fear could be overcome, there was still a stumbling block. It was the location of the place. It was remotely situated, and getting there was an almost insurmountable problem. They had overcome this in part by erecting buildings of rough wood in which there were bunks for men to sleep.

Every source where more men might be found had already been explored. Management decided to experiment with women on some of the lighter operations.

Asbury Park would provide the nearest source of any possible labor pool. It was fall. Hotels no longer needed workers. Many of them, facing a long winter of idleness, might be glad to overlook the threat of danger in a powder plant, and take a chance on earning the money. If any recruitment were possible, it was in Asbury Park.

I consulted the schedule of the Jersey Central Railroad. A train left Asbury in time for workers to make the 7 a.m. shift. Also, one came back to Asbury Park about 7 p.m. Only one difficulty remained, transportation from the station to the plant. Management brushed aside the last obstacle. They would commandeer trucks assigned to the plant and dispatch them to the station to pick up the workers.

I went to Asbury Park. In two days — Wednesday and Thursday — I was able to recruit between 30 and 40 women as possible employees. If half that number showed up, I felt I would still call it a good start. They would report for work Saturday morning.

Friday afternoon, Oct. 4, 1918, I went to the plant to talk with the employment manager about my plans. I took with me the names and addresses of the women who had expressed a willingness to work. He was impressed by my success, but it was very obvious he was worried.

This new thing was fraught with a thousand uncertainties and unforeseeables. Not alone was there the novelty of women; they were Negro women. I saw his plight. I told him I would come back tomorrow and help in adjusting the new workers to their jobs and surroundings. He suggested he could arrange to put me up very

comfortably at the plant for the night. This would save me the trouble of getting up before daybreak. But I insisted on going home, having been away for a half-week.

I left Morgan about 6 p.m. That night there was an explosion at the plant. Shells, dynamite and powder went off. There was utter devastation. Bright flames, shooting into the sky, could be seen for 20 miles. Plate glass windows in stores in Newark cracked and fell in bits like one crushing an egg shell. Frame houses, distances away, rattled as if caught in the current of a Vesuvian eruption. The disaster claimed 64 souls.

This reflection comes: Would I be writing these experiences if I had listened to the employment manager and stayed in Morgan that night?

TALE 67

I was suddenly seized with an irresistible urge to go to Sheepshead Bay. I do not know why. I had done nothing consciously to bring on the desire. Yet I welcomed it.

I was expeditious about my action. I would go Saturday.

As I stood on the platform at the Hudson Tubes awaiting the arrival of the subway train, I was aware of a sense of anxiety. My whole being lighted up to an echelon of exhilaration as the train came grinding in with "Brighton Beach" emblazoned on the first car. When the train came up from the underground at Prospect Park I had the feeling of one who was near home after a leave of absence. I knew every station between Prospect Park and Sheepshead Bay. More than that, I knew the running time from one station to another. I could, therefore, almost call the second when I would reach the place I was bound.

As soon as I heard the trainman put on the brakes, I arose. I was the first one to go through the sliding door and step on the platform of heavy planks.

Two things drew me to Sheepshead Bay. First, I just had a great fondness for the place itself. For me, it was a nautical romance.

I was singularly fascinated by the sight of the ships as they turned and started down the inlet for a pier and safe landing. Once, I saw an almost unbelievable sight. A pure white ship came into view. The waters were rough. It bounced a bit on the waves. Soaring just above it was a sea gull, its wings spread wide. It was talking. It was saying: "Follow me, I will pilot you into a safe and stormless haven."

I was carried away by the salty talk of the captains of the ships as they exchanged the experiences of the day. Some of their words

remain unintelligible to me until this day.

And then the anglers came down the gangplanks of the boat. For them, I had mixed feelings. With those who come with pouches crammed full of blues, porgies, fluke, I had full joy. But I could not restrain a feeling of — well, not necessarily sorrow, but at least disappointment — for those who had arisen before daybreak and gone on the waters as far down as Sandy Hook, on over to Atlantic Highlands, and came back empty-handed.

But the main and most compelling reason for my wanting to go back was to see and say “hello” and “thank you” to the fellows and one woman with whom I had worked during my student days.

Six years had gone by since I was last a waiter. I felt that I owed a report to these fellows. I could go back now with dignity, but humility.

Waiters are a peculiar lot. They are at one and the same time a complete merger of servility and vanity. They will sometimes bow and seem servile, but at that moment feel an inward glow at their own knowledge of how cleverly they can handle the guests. There is not one bit less of the pride which a sculptor experiences when he carves a beautiful statue out of a rough stone block, or a composer revels in when he initials little dots on a sheet of paper that will be sung for a thousand years, when a waiter glows over the compliments of his guests for the excellence of his service.

But waiters do not take kindly to outsiders. Be a waiter for life. Don't use their occupation as a stepping-stone.

I was an outsider. I did use waiting on tables as a means of earning money for my education. But among these men, I was the only student. They could have — had they been less considerate — made my job impossible.

They did not. I was grateful to them. Seeing them again would permit me to say “thank you,” and “I have not disappointed you.” I timed my trip to arrive at Tappin's Inn exactly at 5 o'clock. This would be just about the time for the ending of the first dinner sittings. The fellows would be bringing the soiled dishes and linens out of the dining room and into the kitchen. I was precise in my arrival. As I entered through the kitchen door, several persons saw me simultaneously. In unison the cry went up: “Doc! Hello, Doc!”

Miss Lilly, the pastry cook and the only woman among all the men, her fingers stuck with soft dough, rushed to me and threw her arms about me. “Doc, my son! I'm so glad to see you. We hear that you done good.”

I could not respond. Fellows, as they came out of the dining

room, set their trays down and surrounded me. George Hall, Frank Chavis, Nick Greta, Ed Mason, the busboy. Then came Rocks. Rocks was in the most favored position of all the waiters, since he was the personal waiter for Mr. and Mrs. Villepeque, the owners of Tappin's Inn.

To him I was personally indebted, for it was he who gave the final word to Lee Smith, the headwaiter, to hire me. Rocks came to me and said, "Lemme look at you, you all right, boy?" Just then Charley Williams came out of the dining room. Charley was the kind of guy who never said a good word about anyone. He was the only Negro that I ever knew who had a pronouncedly Roman nose. Rocks turned to Charley and said: "Charley, here's old Doc. Boy looks good, ain't changed a bit." In a growling statement that sounded above all the other chatter, Charley replied "Aw, them kind of niggers don't change. They look the same at 77 as they do at 17."

TALE 68

Commissioner William J. Brennan was director of Public Safety of Newark from 1917 to 1930. I got to know him quite well. He took a liking to me, and I to him.

So cordial did our relationship become that I could go to his office, in the basement of City Hall on the Green Street side, and express a wish to see him and it would be granted. I confess my respect for him was not absolutely pure. In it was a tinge of selfishness.

In a wave of self-righteousness, the clergy, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and other religious bodies had pressured the City Commission to pass an ordinance which forced the legitimate theaters to keep their doors closed on Sundays.

There was an exception for moving picture houses, but with a proviso. The proviso was that all monies collected from Sunday performances over and above all legitimate expenses for the house be turned over to the city and be distributed to charitable and social service organizations. These funds were channeled through Commissioner Brennan's department.

When the turn came for the Urban League to be the beneficiary, he always saw to it that our share came from one of the largest houses. It was natural, if indeed selfish, to keep in good graces with him.

It was not unusual to get a call from his office to come to see him. He wanted nothing in particular. He just wanted to talk to me. I would sit and listen to stories of his boyhood in Ireland —

the brogue still so thick I could scarcely make out some of the words — and of his early life in this country. He had been a plumber and steamfitter before going into politics. With one leg up on a long oak table, and sucking a pipe, he would talk and chuckle.

One day I got a call from his office. I must hurry down. The commissioner was laughing when I entered the door.

"Sit down. I want to tell you a great joke. I have just met a colored man who was both a Catholic and a Democrat."

TALE 69

I had a friend, Lenora. He was an Italian. He was a little guy, littler than Lec Smith. Lenora was a gardener, certainly the best gardener who ever grew eggplant. He had a small produce farm, perhaps seven or eight acres, down on the Passaic River, within walking distance of my house.

One could go to Lenora's farm and ask for golden bantam corn, wax beans, eggplant, lima beans, anything, and he would pick it for you right before your eyes.

The spring had been wet, the temperature warm. Lenora's new vegetables looked like a bumper crop. Then came a spell of dry weather. It would not rain. Slowly the new shoots of plants began to wither. It was tragic to watch Lenora, a pail and a cup in hand, pouring water into the mouths of withering plants.

One day I went to make a purchase. I had heard a radio commentator say that there would be a heavy rain that night.

"Well, Lenora," I said, "you've got nothing to worry about now. There'll be a heavy rain tonight."

He looked up at the sky. It was without a cloud. "Who tolda you dot?"

"The man on the radio just said it. I heard him."

"Aw, sheet! Da man on da radio, da man on da radio! What da hell he know? Jesus Christ, da man upstairs. Only heem maka da rain."

TALE 70

Walking on Market Street, I came to Plane Street. I was about to step off the curb when I noticed a man approaching. Immediately I had the feeling that I knew him. As we neared each other, I was sure.

"Ninny Gholson," I exclaimed.

"Ain't this Sonny Ashby?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll swan."

Ninny was the fellow who had beaten me up when we were small boys in Newport News. He had come North to work during the war. He was a riveter at the Submarine Boat Corp. in Port Newark.

"They say you're a big man in town, Sonny," were his departing words.

TALE 71

Reverend Terry Redd and I stood on the northwest corner of High and West Market streets one Monday morning. It was November. An unannounced frigid blast had come down from the North. The sun shone brilliantly, but it lacked the thermal potency to drive the chill from the air. In a little puddle of water in the street near the curb, icy fingers stretched across it in a bizarre pattern.

Reverend Redd was very dark. The cold, dry air caused an ashen coloring over his face and on the top of his head, a physical phenomenon not unusual on the skins of very dark people when winter comes.

The preacher was a roly-poly little man about 5 feet, 6 inches, perfectly round, without even a whisper of a waist line. If anyone had ever decided to make a black Santa Claus — and why not? — here was the perfect model.

Reverend Redd was the pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church on Sussex Avenue. He was not exactly illiterate, but if his formal education could have been examined and tallied up, it certainly would not have measured more than second grade.

What he lacked in the schoolroom, however, he more than made up for in what is commonly called mother-wit. His bold self-confidence and an almost reckless aggressiveness somehow enabled him to work out a deal with a German congregation whose forebears had built the New Hope Baptist Church, for a down payment of but a few hundred dollars.

A rumbling noise struck our ears. A huge steel coal truck was coming in full speed down the hill on West Market Street. The traffic light on the corner flashed red and the truck came to a noisy stop. "Brother," said Reverend Redd, "see that nigger in that truck?" "Yes." "Lemme tell you something 'bout that nigger. Before I come to Newark I lived in Philadelphia and had a barber shop on South Street. My wife, Lucindy, had a cook shop just a few doors down the street from me.

"One mornin' the nigger come in her shop and ordered breakfast. My wife give him a big dish of oatmeal with sugar and sweet milk. Then she give him three pork chops fried all nice and

brown. And a whole lot of fried hash potatoes and plenty of cornbread and coffee. When he finished, Lucindy went to him and asked him if he had enjoyed his breakfast. He say 'yes!' 'That'll be 35 cents,' Lucindy say. That stinkin' nigger pounded on the table and say, 'I ain't payin' you nothin' till I gets a bill.'

" 'Aw, come on, brother,' Lucindy say, 'you done eat the victuals. You said they was good. Why do you want to act like that?' 'I ain't payin' you one penny till you give me the bill,' he say.

"Lucindy got mad. She come up to get me. She told me about it. I had a man in the chair. I was a-shavin' him. I wiped off the razor, folded it, and put it up my sleeve. I said, 'scuze me, brother, I be right back.' That nigger was still sittin' in the chair at the table. I walked over to him and I said politely: 'Brother, you had your breakfast and you said it was good?'

" 'Yes,' the nigger said. 'Why don't you pay my wife her money?' 'I told her that I ain't payin' nothin' till I gets a bill.' I put my foot on the rung of the chair and pinned the nigger to the table.

"I put my left hand on his head and then I open the razor and drawed it 'cross his throat and I said, 'Here's the bill, this razor's the bill!' The nigger hollered loud enough to wake up all South Street. He jumped up, rammed his hand in his pocket, brought out a greenback and throwed it on the table, runnin' out, hollering 'Don't kill me, Brother Redd! Don't cut my throat!' First time I seen the nigger since. That's been a year ago."

TALE 72

There are so many, many stories told about how Paul Robeson became a singer. This one, as far as I know, has never been told. But Paul himself told it. However, before I relate to you his version, it will be necessary that I set the scene.

After the cessation of World War I, hundreds of Negro young college graduates flocked to New York. They came for a great variety of reasons. Some would further their education. Some came in the faint hope that they might find some employment at which they could work with dignity and would not imperil their educational status. Others returned to jobs which they had held before their stints in the military. Our minds were young and would not be bridled. We must talk. The things we had learned in college must not atrophy; we must not allow them to go to seed. We had no lyceum or hall in which to meet. We had no name. We came from a great variety of educational backgrounds: Harvard, Yale, Rutgers, Columbia, New York University, City College of New York, and Fordham

University.

Our forum was the street. Anywhere on Seventh Avenue between 135th Street and 138th Street that a half-dozen of us got together, the forum was in session. We talked of everything from hell to high water. Mostly our discussions, always in fiery heat, were about the injustices that Negroes must endure, and steps we could take to make the white man cease his cruelties. We looked at ourselves, measured our pitiful plight, and then spat on a torn Woodrow Wilson poster that dangled loosely from a post, and cursed his lies about a world safe for democracy.

I recall the names of some who, at one time or another, let their voices be heard at our unscheduled caucuses: Hubert Delaney, Walter White, Dr. Chester Booth, Dr. Louis T. Wright, Harry Bragg, A. Philip Randolph, Ellis Rivers, Aiken Pope, Claude McKay, Harold Jackman, Norman Gray, Lester Walton. I went over from Newark to these forums.

There was another fellow, very handsome: I seem to remember him as Davis. I know he was a lawyer, and the owner of the *Amsterdam News*, a fledgling newspaper, challenging the older and more substantial *New York Age*, owned and published by Fred R. Moore. One other guy was unforgettable – a loud-mouthed fellow named Duncan. He had opinions on everything, and he could not be shouted down, no matter how annoying. This was in his favor and he knew it. He was a mortician, very successful, with a parlor on the street floor on Seventh Avenue, just a few doors above 135th Street.

There was another whose name I cannot recall. He tried to persuade us to take seriously a new kind of political philosophy. He wanted us to become Socialists. This was a time when any Negro in the country who could and did vote was a Republican, for the humanitarianism and sincerity of Father Abraham was still potent in 1920, and hadn't he freed the slaves and been the founder of the Republican Party?

One more fellow, who simultaneously stirred us into burning fire and sent chills into the marrow of our bones. He was a West Indian, from Jamaica and easily the most brilliant of all of us. I cannot recall his name. When he spoke the whole street became silent. It could hear itself breathing. He was the most profound in his understanding, and easily the most universal in his reading. He had studied at the London School of Economics. He reeled off pages of Karl Marx, as does a child repeating its first discovery of its knowledge of the A-B-C's. If I heard his voice today, I would recognize it though 60 years stand between then and now. A gnawing sensation of

puzzlement overcomes me whenever I think of him. Certainly, he was one of the most miserable human beings that I ever saw. Disappointed and distraught because he could get no job that utilized even one-tenth of his capabilities, he turned his mind and his emotions inward. These incubated, festered. His whole insides were a cancer of hate. We were his outlet; his poison spilled out to us. Simultaneously, he stirred us to the brink of action and made us afraid of consequences.

“Get rid of your dreams,” he exhorted. “The white man will never let you realize them. He will send you only nightmares. We are a nucleus of power. Are you so blind that you cannot see that? Unite, organize, attack! Let us storm the citadels of power. Throw the rascals out. Take over like Lenin and Trotsky did in Russia.”

It was announced in the press that Paul Robeson would go to London to appear in a play opposite Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Our little group felt very proud. We decided that we would have some sort of testimonial as an expression of our joy in Paul’s selection, and also to wish him the best of luck in his new venture. We decided on a banquet. It would be held at Craig’s, a very famous eating house on 130th street, between Lenox and Seventh avenues. Paul was then appearing on Broadway, in “Shuffle Along,” Miller and Lyles’ fine musical comedy, the first such Negro show ever to play Broadway.

The banquet could not be held until midnight, since our guest could not get uptown until after the show. Aubrey Lyles and Noble Sissle from the show came up. Flournoy Miller and Eubie Blake did not. Several of Paul’s friends from his class asked if they might come. Of course we were glad to have them. After dinner came the time for amenities and accolades. There is one comment in particular, that has stayed with me for 60 years. It was uttered by a classmate, a young Jew, very expensively dressed, dangling his Phi Beta Kappa on a gold watch chain. After talking of the depth of his friendship for Paul, he said, perhaps half-humorously: “Frankly, I am glad to see Paul Robeson leave New York, where I practice my profession as a lawyer. I would hate to think that I had as competition such a brilliant legal talent as that of Paul Robeson to contend with.” Then came Paul’s time to respond. There were, of course, the usual bland words of thanks to us for the party. Also he expressed thanks, in a very moving manner, to Messrs. Sissle, Blake, and Miller for giving him the opportunity to perform in their show. And then came his explanation of how he became a singer. If I do not repeat his words verbatim, I am sure that I shall not be far off. Here they are:

“You know I never planned to be a singer. I thought that I would

practice law and do a part in the theater every once in a while if a good part came along. But I had just finished school. I had no job. My son had just been born and neither Essie nor I knew just how we would make ends meet.

"It was Saturday night, about 12 o'clock. I decided that I would take a walk out on Seventh Avenue. I turned the corner of Seventh Avenue and 135th Street. Some one whistled; I turned my head. A fellow said, 'Hey, you!' I stopped. 'Me?' I echoed. 'Yes, wait a minute. I want to speak to you.' He came very close to me. 'Hey, do you know where I can get a bass singer?' I thought, 'The guy is crazy,' and I started to walk away. 'Wait a minute,' he kept on. 'I'm in desperate straits. I'm So-and-So from the Harmony Kings in the Broadway show, "Shuffle Along." Our bass singer has left us. If I can't get another one by Monday night, our act can't go on. I need a bass singer.' I then straightened up, and in the deepest voice that I could command. I said: 'Brother, you are looking straight into the mouth of the best bass singer that ever sang a note.' 'Aw, come on, man,' he replied. 'I ain't jivin', I'm talking business. This ain't no joke.'

" 'I'm not either,' I responded positively. He then took a pad from his pocket. He asked my name. I told him my name. He then wrote an address on the pad and said, 'Come to this place tomorrow at 2 o'clock for an audition.' I did not tell Essie. I was afraid to. I was punctual the next day in my arrival at the designated place. When I arrived, I was met by a booming voice, singing 'Old Black Joe.' 'There goes my chance,' I thought. I turned to go out, but the fellow saw me. He hailed me, and ran and took me by my sleeve.

"It came my time. I think that my 'Old Black Joe' at that moment would have done credit to Feodor Chaliapin (the great Russian bass). The fellow jumped up in delight. 'That's better than anything our man ever done,' he exclaimed. We rehearsed the rest of the day. Monday night I must go on. I hired a tuxedo that didn't exactly fit. In the scene in which we were to sing was a store. We had to come through a door to enter. I stumbled on the sill of the door. Essie sat in the front seat and she stretched her arms to catch me.

"In one of the songs I got a bit off-key. I had the brains to know that, so that I just stopped singing until a line came that I could join in again."

TALE 73

Joseph H. E. Scotland was affectionately called "Judge" by everyone. He was not really a judge. He had succeeded in having himself appointed a justice of the peace, and maintained a little one-room office on the street floor of a four-story brick apartment house on the corner of High and West Market streets. His office stayed open for business from 6 to 9 o'clock on two evenings a week.

His real job was that of custodian of mortgages for Essex County. Whether true or false, there was the pervading belief that the "Judge" - without authorization from any source - had himself given this imposing title to his job to lift it from the commonplace into the select.

His was certainly the most prestigious position held by any Negro in New Jersey at that time. Not alone did he carry the key, but without his permission no one could enter the compartment where many thousands of important documents were kept, some going back to that brave colony of men under the doughty Robert Treat who came down from Connecticut to found Newark in 1666.

In addition to this authority, he could also come to work wearing a white shirt and necktie with pressed coat and trousers like any white gentleman. On occasions he would be taken by distinguished white members of the New Jersey legal fraternity to have lunch or dinner in one or the other of the city's two class restaurants: W. B. Day and Brother, or Simon Davis. If he, a Negro, had gone alone to these places, he might have been denied service.

Around the turn of the century Scotland, as a young man, came to Newark and became interested in politics in the Republican Party. He possessed his full share of intelligence and no more scruples than are required of a politician to be successful. He rose quickly to the leadership of the Negro contingent in Essex County. As a reward for his successful service in a county election, the Board of Freeholders gave him a job as caretaker of mortgages. The job had absolutely no importance. It was perhaps just one level above janitor, the highest occupation to which Negroes could aspire.

A lawyer compelled to make a search might need to spend a whole morning seeking a particular paper. The vast number of large covers holding these irreplaceable documents more than filled the shelves, and many lay askew on the tables or benches in the compact room housing them.

Scotland was intelligent enough to see the jumbled condition of the papers under his care. By his own ingenuity, he worked out a system to control all of the documents with which he had been

entrusted. He codified them, giving each a number and putting them in alphabetical order. So absolutely thorough was his knowledge of the papers in his care that if a lawyer approached him and gave the name of a client, Scotland could tell not only the volume but almost the page on which the name would be found.

Such efficiency brought quick rewards, and county officials throughout the state learned of it. Hudson County, Mercer County, and Atlantic County Boards of Freeholders petitioned the Essex County board to permit them to borrow the Judge so that he could install for them the same system of efficiency in their counties.

One morning in May, 1931, I sat in Scotland's office. I had not been there very long when in came W. P. Allen, a Negro lawyer who lived in Montclair but had his office on West Market Street in Newark. After greeting us, Allen congratulated "Judge" on the efficiency with which he had organized the mortgages.

Then he asked, "Judge, how long have you been on this job?" Judge, who had been born in Antigua, then a British island in the Caribbean, and had never quite lost his West Indian accent or the polite British manners of his early training, answered: "My dear friend, if I am on this job until June 21, I shall have been here 25 years."

"Twenty-five years?" echoed Allen.

"A full quarter of a century," assured Judge.

"We ought to give him a party," said Allen.

"Oh, no," demurred Judge, throwing up his hand in shock at the suggestion.

"I mean it," continued Allen. "Bill, I suggest you be the chairman of a committee of sponsors."

At this moment, Dr. William W. Wolfe, a physician who had practiced medicine in Newark for more than 40 years, came in. He and Scotland were very close friends. Allen said, "I'm very glad you came in, Doc. Next month Judge will have been on this job for 25 years. I say that we ought to throw a party for him. I've told Bill he ought to be the chairman."

Judge said, "If you fellows are serious about this thing, I suggest that you add to the committee my dear friend, George E. Bates, grand secretary and treasurer of the Independent Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World." I told Dr. Wolfe that there would be an immediate need of cash. In all probability, a deposit would be required on any place we secured for the dinner as a proof of good faith. Also, money would be needed for the printing and mailing of invitations.

I was instructed to secure a place. On the southeast corner of Park Place and Center Street, just across the street from the Hudson Tubes station, was a fine restaurant. It was operated by a Jew. I went to him and told him my plans. To my surprise and pleasure, he responded, "Oh, I know Judge Scotland. He's a fine man and I think he should be given a party. But I'm sorry, I can't help you. You see, I have a steady dinner trade. If I did what you wish, I should have to close my place to my regular diners. I know they would not like it."

I reported this to Judge and Doctor Wolfe. Wolfe was probably the most fiercely race-conscious individual I ever knew. Born in Texas and remembering all the prejudices of his youth, he had never lost his distrust of all whites. Therefore, he did not accept as fact the reason given for my denial. Rather, in visible anger he denounced it as a ruse, just another cheap trick by white folks to deny any sort of privilege to "my people."

I next went to a very famous eating house located on the corner of Bloomfield and Clifton avenues. It was run by Italians. On the Clifton Avenue side of the building was a sign in bold black letters: "Banquets, Weddings — Our Specialty." I talked to a man, medium-sized, with heavy hair, nearly blonde — which seemed to me an oddity for an Italian. So poor was his English that I had difficulty understanding his words. This much, however, I got clearly: "I can no rent to color people. He no know how to act in fine place like thees."

I was now in a quandry: Must I tell Wolfe and Scotland that again I had been refused? Even more perplexing was whether I should use the exact words which had been told me.

I prepared myself for their reactions. Wolfe cursed. I was shocked. He was an avowed atheist, but of spotless character, and never profane or vulgar, so far as I knew. Disconsolate, he said, "This thing is going to be a flop. I don't want to have no more to do with it — count me out." Judge was equally disappointed and vituperative. "I'm being made a laughing-stock. Call the whole thing off, Bill." I asked for one more try.

On 14th Street at West Market Street, near the old Public Service car barn, was Penn Hall. This was a two-story building, owned by some fraternal organization. The first floor was used for meetings. The second floor had a well equipped dining hall. The dining hall could be rented, but the renters must supply their own caterer to prepare and serve the food. This presented no problem. In Newark were at least a half-dozen competent Negro caterers.

Ten days before the event I was able to report to Judge that the

A WILLIAM ASHBY ALBUM



WILLIAM BUTTON ASHBY
The author's father



SALLY GARY ASHBY
The author's mother

B

Asby Wm. J^r

To the Collector of Taxes for York Co. \$ 4.
 \$ 100 on 1 free person of Colour 1/100 \$ on 5 property val. at \$ 58. 1. 23
 County of Poor Levy ————— 1. 08
 Paid H. Charlesworth \$ 2. 26



William M. Ashby posed with a group of young women on the campus of Howard University in Washington in November, 1906. He had gone there for a football game between Howard and Lincoln University, where he was then a student. (Tale 38)



This was an advertisement for the Islesworth Hotel in Atlantic City, where William Ashby worked as a waiter in the early 1900s. He was there in 1910 when Jack Johnson knocked out Jim Jeffries in the first "Fight of the Century." (Tale 42)



William M. Ashby was one of the founders of the Yale University Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha. He is third from the right in the middle row of the chapter's founders, photographed in 1915. (Tale 54)



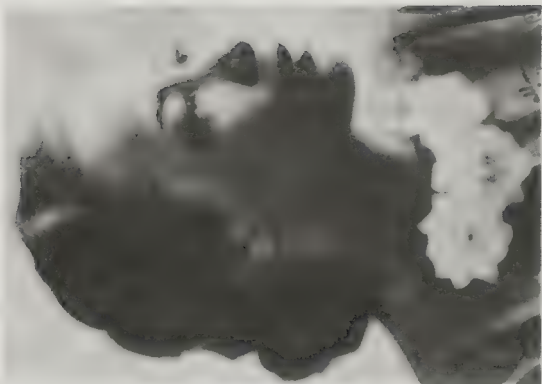
MARY ARNOLD ASHBY
The author's wife since 1914



KATE ARNOLD
The author's mother-in-law



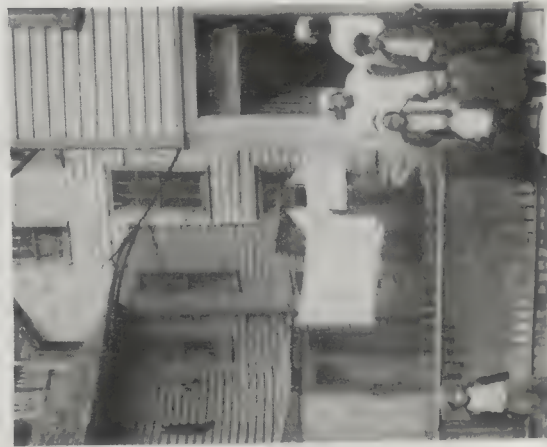
KATHRYN ASHBY
The author's daughter, about 1920



KATHRYN ASHBY
As a college student, 1936



The Urban League of Essex County was founded in 1917, with William M. Ashby as its first director, to try to improve the living conditions of black people in Newark. These pictures were taken in alleys and backyards in the 1910s and '20s.





EUGENE KINCKLE JONES
Hired Ashby for Urban League



PAUL ROBESON
Singer couldn't stay at YMCA



FELIX FULD
Merchant and philanthropist

K



WILLIAM J. BRENNAN
Newark public safety commissioner



William Ashby recalls when children at the City of Newark's "Camp Avon by the Sea" were segregated by race. This was a scene at the camp in Neptune in 1928. (Tale 84)



JOSEPH H. E. SCOTLAND
"Judge" was honored at dinner



ROLAND HAYES
Famed tenor dined with Ashbys



William M. Ashby, right, and Simeon Osby inspect a garden on the grounds of the Springfield, Illinois, Urban League. Ashby was director of the agency from 1932 to 1944.



William M. Ashby, first director of the Urban League of Essex County, posed with James A. Pawley, one of his successors, outside the agency's headquarters in Jones Street in Newark during its 50th anniversary in 1967.



William M. Ashby received 80th birthday greetings from the Newark Human Rights Commission in 1969. Making the presentation is Mrs. Sylvia Josephson, who served with him on the commission. (Tale 117)



The new Urban League headquarters at 506 Central Avenue, Newark, was named in honor of Mrs. Margaret Chubb Parsons, left, in December 1971. Mrs. Parsons, a longtime benefactor of the Urban League, was joined by William M. Ashby and Mrs. Tina Bohannon, a Newark educator.



William M. Ashby and his wife, Mary, shared a laugh with Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson at an 85th birthday party sponsored by the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee in October, 1974.



Many members of William Ashby's family flanked him for this group portrait at his 90th birthday celebration on October 15, 1979. Party was sponsored by Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee.

Office of the Mayor

CITY OF NEWARK NEW JERSEY

Proclamation

WILLIAM ASHBY DAY
October 15, 1979

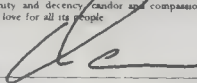
- WHEREAS William M. Ashby, a distinguished citizen of Newark, today celebrates his 90th birthday, and he and his wife, Mary, recently marked their 65th wedding anniversary, and
- WHEREAS William M. Ashby has been a tireless servant of his community and a steadfast champion of racial equality, interracial understanding, and social justice, and
- WHEREAS William M. Ashby was a founder of the Urban League of Essex County and the United Way of Newark, and has been active with the Newark Human Rights Commission, the Newark Senior Citizens Commission and many other organizations, and
- WHEREAS William M. Ashby was the first Black full-time social worker in New Jersey, and has helped untold numbers of people - particularly the Black, the poor and the elderly - to find a better life in Newark, and
- WHEREAS William M. Ashby, with the constant support of his wife, continues to devote his considerable energy and wisdom to the betterment of our city, and continues to demonstrate his unwavering faith in our future, and
- WHEREAS The Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee, of which Mr. Ashby was a founder, is honoring Mr. and Mrs. Ashby at a banquet this evening at the Robert Treat Hotel,

NOW, THEREFORE, I, KENNETH A. GIBSON, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, do hereby proclaim Monday, October 15, 1979 as

WILLIAM ASHBY DAY

in the City of Newark and call upon all citizens of Newark to pay tribute to William Ashby and his wife for their long service and deep devotion to our community, and to wish them many more years of positive endeavor. I propose that all citizens honor the Ashbys by rededicating ourselves to the values which they embody so well: Dignity and decency, candor and compassion, loyalty to our city, and love for all its people.

SIGNED



MAYOR



response to the invitations was such as to guarantee the success of his silver anniversary. He was jubilant. He said, "Bill, if you pull this thing over, I'll buy you a panama hat."

On the night of June 12, 1931, the banquet hall was packed. On the steps leading to the hall, and even on the street, were late-coming admirers pleading to get in. Friends came from Washington, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn. This testimonial to Joseph H. E. Scotland made history.

I still have a picture which is a panoramic view of the dining room. More whites than Negroes are at the tables. Two very distinct and noteworthy things came from the anniversary celebration. It was certainly the first time in New Jersey that whites of influence and wealth joined with Negroes to honor a Negro purely because of his achievement, and because he was held in such high personal esteem.

A telegram came from Gov. Morgan Larson. Distinguished Harvard-trained counsellors, whose reputations were nationwide and whose clients were giant corporations, mingled freely with the little peanut lawyers, the "ambulance chasers," thus knocking class into a cocked hat.

I remember clearly a letter from Judge Joseph L. Smith, and from Judge Douglas Flanagan. They could not be present, but remembered with checks and with words of warm affection. This was, I am sure, the first time in New Jersey that whites and Negroes had sat down at the same table to break bread on a purely social basis. For this one occasion at least that social inequality by which whites had degraded and humiliated Negroes was cast to the winds.

Judge Scotland honored his promise. He purchased for me a genuine panama hat from "Nisenson the Hatter," whose shop was on the corner of Washington and Academy streets. It cost \$5. It was a beautiful hat. I wore it, wore it, wore it.

TALE 74

We lived at 9 Orleans St. We occupied the upper floor of a two-family frame house. Kathryn, as I now think of her, was about 5½ years old, certainly not a day over six. She had been christened in Saint Philip's Episcopal Church. This house of worship was located on High Street, just one building in from Bleeker Street, roughly a block and a half from our house. The Rev. Robert D. Brown was the priest of the church. He lived down the street, just a few houses from us, at 25 Orleans St. He had a daughter, Ruth, who was perhaps 10 or 11 years old. On weekday mornings, she stopped by to pick up Kathryn and take her to Burnet Street School, about four blocks

away.

On Sunday mornings she came by to get her to take her to Sunday school. Christmas was coming. Kathryn came home from Sunday school and announced to us that there was to be a Christmas pageant in which all the Sunday school children would take part.

She was given a little stanza of eight lines which she was to learn and say in the chorus. The children's service was held at 10 a.m. so as to be out of the way for the regular adult ceremonies which started at 11. The children were dressed in white surplices with tiny wings, to make them angels. Kathryn was beautiful. I am sure that God made all of His child angels look just like her. The children gathered in the rear of the church. They marched down the aisle toward the altar singing hymns of adoration to the newborn Christ, swinging little lamps from which came tiny puffs of smoke that exuded an exotic aroma. I took it to be incense, but I am not sure of this since I was but remotely acquainted with the liturgy of an Episcopal church. All my church-going had been in a Presbyterian church.

I thought I could hear Kathryn's voice above all the rest, although this might have been an auricular delusion, perhaps inspired by my vanity because of my pride in her. This is true: She possessed an alluring, beautiful speaking voice, but as a singer she was no great performer, and even as she grew in her teens she easily went flat on a note.

She came home on a Sunday in the middle of February and told us that they would soon be preparing for the celebration of Easter. This service, like the Christmas observance, was before the adult ceremonies. They marched down the aisle, the children waving in unison fronds of palm, and singing an anthem to the risen Christ.

We had just finished dinner, but had not gotten up from the table. Kathryn sat across from me at our round mission oak table. Without even a second to give me time to prepare myself, she asked, "Dad, how old was Jesus when He died?"

With all my pontifical erudition of church history, I replied with confidence: "Well, Kathryn, church scholars say that Jesus died a very young man, about 33 years old." Kathryn's face was a portrait of bewilderment. Something in my pompous and positive declaration was simply beyond her power of reason.

Gripped by her puzzlement, she asked: "How could Jesus be a man when He was just born at Christmas and now He is dead at Easter?"

TALE 75

The Lincoln-Douglass celebration committee was an important civic organization. Its purpose was apparent from its name: to keep alive and pay homage to the memory of the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, and his distinguished Negro contemporary, Frederick Douglass.

There were certain aspects in the objectives of this committee which gave it uniqueness. It had a reasonable longevity, coming into being in 1913, and continuing without interruption until the 1950s. Thus it survived two wars.

From its inception, it was truly interracial. In it was no friction or suspicion on the part of either white or Negro; thus all manifestations of superiority or inferiority were avoided.

Secondly, as far as anyone knew, Newark was the only city in the nation where honor was paid to two great men at the same time and on the same program.

Third, this was the one civic event in which all the Negroes, irrespective of religious, political or social affiliation, could become involved, each feeling that he was truly a part of the ceremonies.

Carl Bannwart was president of the Lincoln-Douglass Celebration Committee. He was the director of the Newark Shade Tree Commission and a humanitarian in the noblest sense of the word. I served as a member of the program committee. The ceremonies were always held on Lincoln's Birthday.

Through the kindness and interest of its trustees, the Old First Presbyterian Church was made available for the services. They always began precisely at 1 o'clock.

At 12:30, Rodney V. Saylor, the church organist, who donated his services for this particular program, began to send forth soft and sweet strains from the huge pipe organ. It was plaintive music, almost always spirituals.

By this time, every seat was occupied and the overflow crowd stood against the walls.

Not infrequently at our programs, the minister of the church came to bid us welcome and to invoke the blessings of the Almighty upon the program, and all those assembled.

The program, with three main features, was a simple one.

A student from one of the grade schools was selected to deliver Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. For the address on Abraham Lincoln, we selected a white man. For the one on Frederick Douglass, a Negro.

Oddly enough, securing speakers to talk about Lincoln and Douglass never presented the program committee with a formidable task. We found men sometimes with wide reputations who professed to be scholars of Lincoln and were pleased to accept our invitations to come to us and display their erudition.

We offered a small honorarium, but more often than not the speaker returned it to the committee.

I remember especially one program. Our speaker on Lincoln was a Mr. Putnam. There was some military rank attached to his name, since he served in the Spanish-American War with Col. Theodore Roosevelt.

He was a member of the family controlling G. P. Putnam, New York publishers, and a direct descendant of Israel Putnam, commander of a band of troops who fought the British in New England in the Revolutionary War. He had quite a reputation as a Lincoln scholar.

Unfortunately, while his address would not be characterized as a failure, it could not be judged as a rousing success.

There were several very obvious reasons for its ineffectiveness. Putnam was a small man. He was now quite advanced in age, and his voice was weak, carrying no farther than half the length of the auditorium. Thus, while those of us who sat within hearing distance were impressed by his knowledge of Lincoln, those out of hearing range soon became bored and restless.

With William Pickens, who was to address us on Frederick Douglass, the contrast was shocking. He was field director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In height, Pickens was perhaps 6 feet, 3 or 4 inches. He possessed an erect and very muscular frame. His voice was booming. Moreover, he had a sense of humor with a repertoire of funny stories, any one of which he could pull out at will. He was able to recapture the audience which had become listless and indifferent.

When the services finished at the church, we all went to the City Hall. Here we assembled for the parade. This was a great feature of the celebration, since it gave the hundreds who were unable to get into the church a chance to see and to clap their hands in praise of what was going on.

This took on a semimilitary look. There were groups of school children. There were the boy scouts in their uniforms. Not alone were there the Newark troops, but others came from as far distant as Brooklyn and Harlem. But the feature which gave it its real military color was provided by the various veterans' posts. In

Newark, there was the strong William Guyton Post, from Elizabeth the Col. Charles Young Post. Other units came from cities in North Jersey.

There was, of course, a grand marshal. That year he was Cornelius M. Brown. Brown was one of the few bonafide Negro businessmen in the city. In the old Center Market on Commerce Street, he had a stall. He sold chickens and from this he was popularly known as "Chicken" Brown. With his dark brown face beneath a high silk hat and dressed in a Prince Albert frock coat, he made an imposing picture. Astride a dapple gray horse, he gave the position as much dignity and importance as it could justly command.

Forming at the City Hall, the marchers, stepping to sounds of brass bands and fife and drum corps, strutted up Broad Street to Market Street. Here they turned and proceeded on to Lincoln's statue located on the esplanade in front of the courthouse. The vast crowd circled the statue. Then began the ceremonies.

First a Negro boy and a white boy jointly placed the wreath of flowers at the feet of the one to whom we had all come to pay honor.

The two youths then climbed up on Mr. Lincoln's lap, one clasping the hand of the other in a symbol of interracial harmony. We then sang James Weldon Johnson's stirring Negro national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," with its words of pathos, inspiration, hope.

A prayer. Then we dispersed, each going his separate way home.

TALE 76

I was on the corner of Broad and Market streets. It was 12 o'clock. I went for lunch in a restaurant that was about five or six doors from Broad Street. It was a small place.

I had a salami sandwich, 30 cents; custard pie, 10 cents; a cup of tea, 5 cents.

When the counterman gave me the check, it was punched 90 cents. "You made a mistake," I corrected politely. "My food was only 45 cents. You punched 90 cents."

"It's 90 cents for you."

"But," I continued in my remonstrance, "look at the menu there."

"I know what it is on the menu. It's 90 cents for your kind." As clear as the daylight outside, it came to me what was

happening. "Oh," I exclaimed, "now I see."

My color was the justification he needed to up my bill 100 per cent. "All right, let's see you get it," I shouted back.

At the cashier's desk, I put down 45 cents and started out.

"Hey, mister," called the cashier, "come back. You made a mistake. Your check is 90 cents."

My retort was quick and positive. "It is like hell. I had a salami sandwich, pie and tea. Here's my card and my telephone number. Come there and try to collect the rest."

I went into the restaurant rather frequently afterwards. Never again was I overcharged.

TALE 77

Lynchings, clubbings, floggings, the cruelest atrocities were happening all over the land. In the Army, not alone in this country but also in France, the most horrible discrimination had been thrust upon Negro soldiers.

It was decided to hold nationwide mass meetings to protest these inhuman acts.

I was the secretary of the Newark branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The executive board of the organization held its meetings in the Urban League building.

The board met to plan a mass protest. It would be a gigantic undertaking bent on pulling protesters from Union, Hudson and Essex counties. But we were up against what seemed to be an insurmountable problem — where was there an auditorium open to us to accommodate such a crowd? No Negro church or lodge hall provided such space.

I said, "Let's go to the Broad Street Theater."

A fellow, interpreting my suggestion to be a joke, jumped up and shouted, "Mr. President, Mr. President, we are here for business. We have no time for fooling."

"I was not fooling," I defended.

Said another man, "You know white people aren't going to let colored people in their theater for a meeting."

"I know of no such thing," I said. "I only know that it has never been tried before."

The first fellow jumped up again. "All right, Mr. President, I make a move that we send Ashby down there to get the theater. If he wants to make a fool of himself, let him."

In begging white people for favors -- we could never demand -- I soon developed for myself an approach. I always formulated in my mind exactly what I wanted, and never stammered or stumbled when making my request. I always made myself believe that I was going to get what I went after. I never told "nigger jokes" or "coon jokes" or sob stories to win their sympathies. I was always cheerful and courteous, though without the faintest tinge of obsequiousness. If my request was not granted, I never waited to hear tales of sorrow or regret as to why. If I was turned down, what difference did it make?

M. S. Schlesinger was the manager of the Broad Street Theater. I knew Schlesinger, not well but sufficiently to get recognition if we met. I was sometimes a patron of the theater, sitting almost always in the gallery, since only on rare occasions would my budget permit me to buy tickets for all of us in the balcony.

The orchestra was out of the question. I have doubts the Englishman, who was the ticket seller, would have sold one to a Negro, even if one appeared with the price.

I had no difficulty getting to see Schlesinger. His office was on the second floor of the building, I said, "I want to rent this theater on a Sunday."

He called to a clerk who was in an adjoining room, "Bring me the schedule of bookings."

"Sorry, can't have that date. Judge Rutherford and his Jehovah's Witnesses are coming on that day. They always pack the theater."

"Here it is again," I thought. "The old familiar pattern." He would ring in another organization for my date, thus allowing himself an escape that would not disturb his conscience by a flat denial.

"What's the next Sunday you have open?" I asked.

He quoted a date -- May 14, 1922.

"I'll take it," I shot back. "How much of a deposit do you want?"

"The rent is \$250. Bring a \$100 deposit."

"I'll be here Monday morning at 10:30."

I informed Dr. William W. Wolfe, who was president of the NAACP. Dr. Wolfe was reasonably well-to-do. Having been a physician more than 40 years, he had accumulated considerable cash, and had several properties from which he received substantial returns.

I was 15 minutes ahead of time as I stepped into the lobby of the theater. It was snowing -- thick, heavy, wet snow. When five

minutes had gone by and Dr. Wolfe had not come, I began to feel a little anxious. I wondered if he had decided we were on a fool's errand, and he did not want to be made a fool of. I saw him come out of a door directly across the street. It was Huyler's Restaurant. He had been there to bolster himself by having a hot chocolate.

"Mr. Schlesinger," he said, "I want to pay you in full for the theater. Have your clerk make out a receipt for me. Then there won't be any trouble."

The crowd was enormous. People stood three and four deep around the walls.

The doors between the orchestra floor and lobby were opened so those packed in the lobby could hear. The aisles were packed until the fire marshal came and ordered them cleared.

The main speaker was the late Congressman Leonidas Dyer from Missouri. For 20 years this small-town Missouri politician preyed on the gullibility of Negroes. Session after session, he introduced in Congress the "Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill." For two decades he kept us in the hopeless belief such a measure might become the law of the land. He knew it never would. But he was mounted on a good horse, and he rode it for all it was worth. It brought him prestige and honors. Negroes flocked to hear him as if he were God coming to deliver them. He was in demand all over the country, and received large fees for harping on the theme: "Stop Lynching." He knew perfectly well Congress would never pass a law outlawing lynching. To "lynch a niggah" was still too good a sport in many parts of the land.

John R. Shillady, executive director of the NAACP, and Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, editor of the *Crisis*, came over from New York.

Tin pails were brought to take the collection. Young women, dressed in white, went through the audience.

The collection total was in excess of \$1,300 -- mostly nickels, dimes, quarters, half-dollars -- an astonishing sum for one afternoon at that time.

A strongly worded resolution of protest was formulated. It was sent in a telegram to President Harding, to urge him to use all the powers of the presidency to immediately bring to an end all the persecutions that innocent citizens were subjected to and the discrimination in the military.

TALE 78

Patriotic citizens formed a volunteer statewide organization to assist the government in the war effort. They were drawn from business, industry, education and the clergy. I can remember the names of only a few: J. William Clark, Clark Thread Co., Harrison; Peter Clark of Nairn Linoleum Co., Harrison; Felix Fuld of L. Bamberger & Co., Newark; A. V. Hamburg, button manufacturer, Newark; Matthew Price, London and Liverpool Insurance Co., Newark.

The organization set for itself three specific aims: Assist in the sale of war bonds, be a liaison between management and labor, thus keeping at a minimum differences which might lead to work stoppages or strikes, and keep morale high at home.

Because of my assignment in the U.S. Employment Service, I was frequently called in to confer with a member of the association, and indeed, to sit in on their executive meetings as they charted their efforts. With many of them, I formed a very cordial relationship.

Of so much value had been their efforts that when the war was over, the War Department awarded them a certificate of merit with warm praise. Dissolution of the committee was natural, since there was nothing left for it to do. But a few persons thought otherwise.

They argued that an organization which had been so effective in war, should now devote itself to peace, and work even harder to get the state back to its peacetime living.

A meeting was called to discuss this point. It was a dinner meeting, held at the Down Town Club, then on the 10th floor of the Kinney Building at Broad and Market streets.

The meeting was presided over by Col. Lewis T. Bryant, who was the commissioner of labor of New Jersey, and also the assistant director of the U.S. Employment Service.

In those days, all after-dinner speakers began in one of the following manners. "Friends, I am reminded of a story they tell about Solomon, the old sheenie" or, "Here's one a friend of mine passed on to me about Tony, the old dago bootblack," or "Did you hear this one about Paddy, the old shanty Irishman?" Or "I must tell you this one about Sam, the old nigger."

Came the time for Felix Fuld to speak. He began by telling a story about an old "darkie" in the South. Really, it was a good joke, not told too well, but I laughed. I laugh freely at any joke if it has humor, no matter at whom it is directed, or about whom it is told.

The meeting was about to adjourn, when I noticed a man some distance from me get to his feet. I recognized him as a manager of the Standard Oil Co. of N.J. He said, "Mr. Chairman, and gentlemen, we have had a wonderful evening and I feel that we have accomplished something. But I think that we ought not to close this meeting before hearing from one young man I see sitting over there. He pestered us a lot, but he always came through when we needed him. I think we ought to have a word from Bill Ashby."

I was shocked. I could not have dreamed that I would be called upon to respond. What would I say?

I told them that as employers, many of them had had the experience of Negroes working in industry for the first time, and that their record on the whole was a good one. I pleaded with them not to retaliate — I had learned many of them planned to get back at Negroes because of the poor performance of some — by firing them and driving them back South by the thousands.

At 8:30 the next morning, just as I entered the door of my office, the telephone rang. My secretary, Miss Estelle Ridley, said "For you, Mr. Ashby."

Mr. Fuld's secretary said, "Mr. Ashby, Mr. Fuld would like to see you today. Can you come?"

"When?"

"It's urgent; can you come right away?"

I started for Bamberger's. All the time I was wondering what I was being called for. Fuld usually gave quite a substantial donation to the work of the league. But his annual donation had been sent just a few months ago. He could not be wanting to make another contribution now.

One other thing: Bamberger's used a full quota of Negroes, men and women, as operators on their elevators, a job opening for which the Urban League had been responsible in the first place. Sometimes when little problems would come up concerning the Negro employees I would be asked to come in and try to settle them. But on such occasions I always talked with Edgar Bamberger, the nephew of Louis Bamberger.

Fuld sat at a large, oval, highly polished dark walnut table as I entered the room. He arose, walked around the table, shook my hand, and bade me sit down.

From his left coat pocket, he withdrew a shining gold cigarette case. He offered me a smoke. It was a Turkish brand, Fatima, I think. These were strong. I did not want it, but what else could I

do?

Back in his seat, he looked worriedly across the table at me and said, "Mr. Ashby, I want to apologize to you for what I said last night."

"Apologize?" I echoed.

"I told a joke which seemed to poke fun at your people," he said. "Please believe me, I meant no harm. I would not insult any man because of his race. Remember, I too come from a people who have known persecution for centuries. I know how deep those jibes can cut. I have slept very little all night. The last thing Mrs. Fuld told me as I left home this morning was to call Mr. Ashby and apologize. Please forgive me."

I knew that never again in my life would I ever be puzzled in the same manner as I was at that moment. Here was I, an insignificant nobody, sitting in the sumptuous office of a man who could command millions, a man who was universally acclaimed as one of the great merchant princes of the nation. And he was apologizing to me.

I know of few examples to match the contrition and humility which came from the soul of Felix Fuld as he leaned across the table that morning and said, "Please forgive me."

TALE 79

In the Newark Police Department was one Negro, who was allowed to wear the uniform. This was not an unlimited privilege. He would be seen carrying out his duties at a Negro dance, church conference, lodge convention. No one ever saw him arrest a white man on a downtown street.

The war was over. Young men kicked off their khaki and rushed into the city in thousands. They had to have jobs. Many of them had served as military police. Something of what they learned as military police could certainly prove valuable as civilian police.

I began the selection of a small number who, I felt, with the appropriate training, would qualify as members of the Newark Police Department. I wrote to the ministers, outlining clearly my purpose, asking them to make a selection of two or three young men from their congregations to prepare themselves as possible appointees. The response was disappointing, almost distressing. One alone replied, Rev. W. W. Fleming, pastor of Zion Baptist Church. I was able to get only eight applicants. They must pass physical, oral and written tests.

The Robert Treat School was located on Norfolk Street, easily reached by most of the men, who pledged they would faithfully stick it out, no matter what, in order to become a police officer. The Robert Treat School then had excellent physical equipment, and a very capable physical instructor.

I went to see Robert D. Argue, secretary of the Board of Education, to get permission to use the school.

"It will cost your organization," he said, "\$20 a night to open the school."

"And where," I asked, "do you think the Urban League is going to get \$20, or even \$1, for this purpose?"

"We have to pay our bills. We'll have to pay the principal for coming down and opening up the school. We'll have to pay the physical instructor. We'll have to pay the janitor, and who's going to pay our light and heat?" he said.

"Listen," I replied, "these guys have just come back from Europe. Some of them laid in the muck and mire in France for one, two, three years. They're lucky. They're home. They could have had their heads blown off, you know that, don't you? You didn't ask them for any \$20 while they were over there. Moreover, if they qualify and are appointed, they will become a great asset to the safety of our city."

"Ashby, you're always coming in here asking for something and you never have any money to pay. Go ahead this time. I'll see to it that the school is opened for your program," Argue said.

I went to Police Chief James A. McRell and asked that he provide an instructor who would teach these trainees what they needed to know about the department, and also their responsibilities as officers of the law. Chief McRell was cooperative. He agreed to furnish each man with a police manual. He himself came to the office of the Urban League and taught the men.

The physical examination was held in the gymnasium of the Avon Avenue School. Six of the eight men were there promptly and took the test. The monitor conducting the test said nothing, but his manner convinced an observer he was pleased with their performances.

I had some real fears about what would happen at their oral and written tests. These were the places where they could easily be knocked out. From various parts of the Negro community, there had arisen a swell of skepticism which could be felt almost anywhere, and much of it was directed at me.

It said, "Ashby ought to be run out of town for fooling those boys. He knows they aren't going to let any Negroes pass to be policemen and arrest white men. And even if they did pass, Brennan is never going to appoint them."

Some in their bitterness went so far as to speak to the trainees themselves and tell them they were fools to waste their time chasing something they never would get.

I was upset by this talk, although I clearly understood it. I could take the cuff no matter where it came from. But I was appalled at the thought of the irrevocable disillusionment which would come to these young men if we missed any step which would cause them even to suspect that they had not been honorably dealt with, or that they had been denied a proper chance.

I knew the Commissioner of the Civil Service Board. He lived on Spruce Street.

I decided to go and see him. I was fully aware of what I was doing. I knew perfectly well that my act was a violation of some kind of law — which one, I did not know. But I was so tortured that pursuit of this course was irresistible.

I carried in my hand a list of the names of the men. "Are any of these names on your list?" I asked.

"Are you crazy, Ashby? You ask a question like that of me? — Don't you know that it is criminal? Don't you know that I could send you to Trenton Penitentiary for this? You are tampering with Civil Service procedure. It's the same as an attempt to bribe," the commissioner said.

"You know I'll never say a word about this. All I want to know is whether any of these names are on your list?"

He left the room and went into a den that adjoined the living room. From my seat I could see one corner of a rolltop desk.

He came back and said "Yes, and if I ever hear it again, I'll say that you're a liar and that I never saw you before."

A list of the names of those in the top bracket who had taken the examination was published in *The Newark Evening News*. Not one Negro's name appeared. The storm against me now and against the men themselves was horrifying. The critics could point their fingers, and laugh derisively, "Ah, didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you they aren't going to let a Negro in?"

In desperation, I went to see Brennan. I said: "You know what the Negroes in Newark are saying about you?"

"What?"

"They are saying that even if some of the Negro boys who took that examination do pass, you won't appoint them."

"That's a lie."

"I know it's a lie, but the Negroes don't know it's a lie."

"I'll appoint them if they pass."

"I got your word for that?"

"Did I ever tell you a lie?"

The next list that appeared had the names of three Negroes. Director Brennan appointed them to the Newark Police Department.

TALE 80

I was on my way to Asbury Park to address the Parent-Teachers Association of the Bangs Avenue Public School. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 1 o'clock. I had left my office in plenty of time so as not to be late.

It was exactly 12 o'clock when I reached Eatontown. A sign on the side of the road read "School — Go Slow — Watch for Children." I slowed to a halt. Just ahead of me was another car, driven by a woman.

An officer stood in front of the building as the children began to come out. His right hand was clenched except its forefinger. He was waving his arm in a circular motion. I interpreted this gesture to mean that I was to move forward. I pulled up alongside the other car. The road was very narrow, only wide enough for one vehicle to pass another.

A man coming in the opposite direction stopped in front of the school to pick up his daughter. To get by me, he had to go partly off the road. He slowed almost to a stop as he reached me, and in anger called out, "Hey, wise guy! Who told you to block the road?"

The police officer noticed this. I, an outsider, had caused an inconvenience of one of the town's leading citizens.

He came to me and demanded abruptly, "Show me your license."

In a second I produced the paper. He examined it. Then he glanced down at the license plate. He took a book from his pocket and began to write in it.

"This is going to cost you \$15."

"Officer," I asked meekly, "what violation am I guilty of?"

"You crossed a school line."

"But I thought by the motion of your hand, you were

beckoning me to come forward."

The children were now all gone. He left me and went to his car. "Follow me," he summoned.

We had gone about a hundred yards when he came to a stop. On the lawn in front of a house that sat perhaps 40 feet off the road was a sign, "Justice of the Peace."

Now I knew. Everything was clear.

New Jersey at that time had a system of appointing "justices of the peace" in various areas of the state. They could hear and adjudicate certain minor infractions of the law. They were paid no salary. Their income came from fines.

This justice had a wide reputation as a tough guy. He threw the book mercilessly at everybody.

"He'll murder me," I thought.

The police officer went to the house and rang the doorbell. A woman responded. I could see her as she shook her head. The officer came back to me. "The justice isn't in," he said. "He won't be in until Wednesday."

He got in his car and waved me to follow. This time we went perhaps a half mile before he stopped.

He came to me again. "This justice is a pretty tough man. I want to warn you."

In desperation and perhaps as a fool, I said, "Officer, can't we fix this thing up some way? I don't know how I'll be able to come down here again."

He went again to his car. He drove very slowly. By now I am sure we had crossed the border line of Eatontown. Not a house was in sight. The whole thing was clear to me now. It was a shakedown.

He stopped and came to me again. "All right, chief," I said. "How much do you want?"

"Oh, give me what you got."

His words astounded me. "This guy is dumb," I thought. "I'll get off as light as I can."

I pulled the money from my watch pocket. "This, officer, is all that I have. I must buy gas in Asbury Park to get back to Newark."

"OK, give me \$1."

I passed him the bill and drove off feeling very proud of my skill as a bargainer. I had gone perhaps a mile when a tormenting thought struck me: "He did not tear up the ticket. He will report me. I will be charged with bribing a police officer. My license will

be revoked. I will be fined. I might even be put in jail."

I turned around. I raced as fast as I could to overtake him. I did.

"Say, officer," I said. "You did not tear up the ticket."

"What ticket?" he asked.

"Don't you remember? I'm the fellow who was at the school in Eatontown?"

He laughed. "That was no ticket."

He drew from his pocket a little blue colored book. He held it out for me to read. In bold letters on its cover was printed "Lydia Pinkham's Potions— Good for All Women's Diseases."

This was the book in which I thought he had written the traffic ticket. In my nervousness and fear, how was I to know I was being offered a page from a Lydia Pinkham ad book instead of the real thing?

I laughed. I was a sucker. I said, "All right, chief. You win."

Even to this day, sixty years later, I smile when I think of it. I do not know what number I was in the book that day. I am sure that I was not number one. I had been bilked out of a dollar; bilked by an officer of the law. That was not an enormous sum. But it would have bought at that time a chicken, potatoes, other vegetables— enough for a Sunday dinner for me, Mary and Kathryn.

I have never been able to whip up any resentment or anger against this man. All right, the law is supposed to protect the citizenry against fraud and deceit. All right, this man was a perpetrator of fraud, and deceit— a violator of the very thing he had sworn to protect. I did not go into the economy of the thing. I did not think him corrupt. I did not know whether this man was being paid enough for his services, and if not, had to resort to these extracurricular demeaning things to make up for the inadequacies.

This I know: It was the common practice of police in that day to shake down motorists. This they did in devious ways, and writing a fictitious ticket in a Lydia Pinkham book instead of the regular, authorized one for a frightened and unsuspecting motorist was only one of their ruses.

He was just a part of a system. Whatever system men develop— religious, political, economic, social, educational— it justifies most of the individuals within it. To break it has penalties— even death could be one of them.

This officer did what every other individual the world over does when overwhelmed by a system: Go along with it.

What is it that they say? "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

TALE 81

I find it very difficult to write this anecdote. I remember for sure only one name. Indisputable facts are too vague and flimsy to hang together and make convincing. Yet I must speak about it for two very good reasons: First, the nationality and ethnic change in the membership of American labor unions; second, Negroes ousting whites and taking over all the official positions of a union.

Around 1915, the Hod Carriers Union was one of the strongest and most powerful units in the Essex County Trades Council. Its membership was almost entirely immigrant Irish, some perhaps 10 years in this country and others but 10 weeks.

The business agent or walking delegate was a fellow known to everyone as "Chris." He had, as far as any one knew, no other name. That is the way that he demanded to be addressed. That is the signature he attached to all papers which he must sign. Chris was said to be a labor despot. He ruled the men with the ruthlessness of a Caligula. There was a behind-his-back saying that the blood in his veins was liquid stones and his heart as hard as Bessemer steel. A story floated about that he was so blasphemous that if he spoke a sentence of three words, its subject had to be "goddam." He permitted a handful of Negroes to belong to his union. But his color hatred denied them many of the benefits that were rightly due them. Even if they showed up first in the hiring hall — and many came as early as 5 o'clock in the morning — when a call came in for a job he would send out all the whites first.

This was a period when all America was experiencing one of the biggest construction programs in its history. About this time millions of Italians, mostly from Calabria and Sicily, came into the country. Largely unskilled, and wanting to be a part of the construction industry, they joined the Hod Carriers Union.

The Irish resented them. Their job security was threatened. "Let's keep them damned wops, them damned guineas out of our union." Hostilities were fierce. There were gang fights which left maimed bodies writhing in pain on a sidewalk.

The Italians split. Dissidents pulled away. So intense was the dissension that Chris decided to get out. The dissidents applied for a charter to set up a new union. They barely had enough dues-paying members to qualify for the charter. But they knew that with their small membership, they could not compete successfully with building contractors against the powerful union from which they had just severed themselves.

Negroes by the thousands began coming into Newark from the

rural South. Without any skills they sought an occupation as common laborers which could use their native strength. They joined the young union. Not more than a year had passed before they realized that they comprised a numerical majority. They began side-of-the-mouth whispering, and called late-night secret meetings in their crowded homes. They talked of "taking over the union."

The leader of those who would engineer this coup was a fellow I seem to remember whose name was "Josephson." What makes me feel that I am correct in that name is that he is one of the two Negroes I ever knew with a distinctly Jewish name. Of this I am sure: He was a stocky, broad-shouldered, dark brown fellow with a closely cropped moustache. Of this, too, I am positive: He had come to Newark from Dothan, Alabama, and was the leader of a colony of Negroes who had come from Dothan and its environs.

His first step in his scheme of usurpation was to enter his name on the slate of a regular election as a vice-president. He won. His position demanded his presence at all meetings. Here he learned all the fine points of union operation. At the same time he was the mouthpiece for Negro members, and for those members he was the racial symbol of their importance.

One morning he came into my office. He told me that there would be an election at the next union meeting and invited me to come. This I thought not only strange, but unbelievable. Anyone who has the slightest awareness about the way labor unions carry on their business, knows that to have an outsider at one of their important meetings is heresy beyond all atonement.

The meeting was held in Rutgers Hall, a two-story frame building located on the corner of Rutgers and West Market streets. The meeting room was on the second floor.

I arrived at precisely the minute I had been instructed to be there. Nothing of what would take place had been leaked to me. I went upstairs deep in wonderment as to why I had been asked to be there. A wall stretched across the room just as one reached the landing at the top of the stairs. I went through the door. Ten feet away was another wall, thus forming an outer room before one entered the main room. A sergeant-at-arms stood guard. He challenged me. I had to wait until Josephson could come before I was permitted to enter. I had the good sense to look around and find an inconspicuous seat in the very rear of the room.

The shrewdest and most corrupt politicians who ever lived never organized a machine that excelled in proficiency as the one put in action at that meeting. There was a roll call and an identification of

all members in good standing. Josephson arose and read his slate of officers. A stooge moved the adoption of the slate; as if they were all puppets and the puppeteer had pulled the strings, all the Negroes arose. They were the majority. All the new officers, except one vice-president, were Negroes. They immediately installed themselves in their various official positions, unseating the whites. It all took place with such rapidity and smoothness that I did not fully grasp what had occurred. I sat there in paralyzed amazement.

What was this thing that had happened before my very eyes? Was this a revolution? Yes. What kind? Certainly nothing like this had ever happened before in America — a usurpation of power by Negroes ousting whites. It was a mirage. What I had seen could not be true. It just couldn't be. I had been duped. Negroes, all Negroes, for all the centuries of their existence had been told, and we all believed, that we were incapable of organization and lacked the mental know-how to execute an action in unity. Yes, all Negroes, except Josephson and his little band from Dothan, Alabama, believed that. There would be retaliation. A revenge must follow. It might be violent. The whites would surely strike back in an attempt to regain their supremacy.

I waited a few minutes, half frightened at all that would happen. As I almost leaped down the stairs on my way out, I was convinced that I had learned one important lesson from these simple unlettered Negroes. No white man would ever tell me again about the lack of courage, or the lack of intelligence of Negroes in the pursuit of any goal which they set for themselves. Had a benign divinity at that moment endowed me with the gift of prophecy, I could have told all America that 50 years hence, incidents of this very nature would be taking place with such frequency as to be commonplace, and no one would pay any attention to them.

TALE 82

I was up on the roof of my garage — it really wasn't a garage, it was a stable which had been built by the man who built the house. He was a carpenter and used the stable for his horse and wagon. A fierce storm had come up in the middle of the night, and had torn loose the tarpaper on one end of the garage. I was attempting a repair job.

Kathryn ran out in the yard. "Daddy, can I go to the Mount Prospect?"

The Mount Prospect was a moving picture house about five or six blocks away. All the children in the neighborhood flocked there

on Saturday afternoons to catch the serials, and to scream and holler at the Lon Chaney horror pictures.

"Kid," I answered, "we were just at Proctor's last night. I don't see why you must go to another show this afternoon."

"Frances and all the other kids are going."

"All right, but Frances and the other kids weren't at Proctor's last night."

"Well, I'm going."

Momentarily ruffled by the defiance of my parental authority, I, like a damned fool, jumped off the roof, grabbed her by her left arm, and spanked her three times.

She screamed. She ran into the house crying.

I climbed back up on the roof. I cried.

TALE 83

It was five o'clock. I had just slipped my right arm into the sleeve of my overcoat to start home when I heard a voice, "Brother Ashby." It was the Rev. Henry T. Borders of Hopewell Baptist Church.

"I'm glad I caught you, brother," he said. "One of the members in my church is in bad shape. She and her children have nothing to eat, and I'm not sure there's enough coal in the stove to keep them warm tonight."

"Reverend," I said, "the Urban League is not a charitable agency. We do not have food or fuel to give to clients."

"You're here to help the poor colored people, aren't you? What are you here for? Those people are in need," he said.

When children are hungry, a social agency cannot escape the responsibility of doing something to ameliorate that hunger by standing on the philosophy or purpose of that agency. Semantics is out. Appeasing hunger is in.

I went out into the street. It was dusk. The temperature was not unpleasant, but just two days before there had been thin ice on little puddles of water, announcing that the inevitable blasts from the North were on their way.

The family lived in Beacon Street. That was about a 10-minute walk from my office. I entered an unlighted hall and walked one flight upstairs. I knocked on the door. It was opened by a young woman certainly not one day over 27 or 28.

Hers was a very pleasant dark brown face, but it did show strains of anxiety and fear. In a plain cotton dress, she was as neat as a pin. The room perhaps measured 10 by 12 feet and was what

I suppose they called their dining room. A small kerosene lamp was in the center of the table.

There were three children. The youngest, perhaps a year old, sat in a high chair. The others, a boy probably three and a girl about five, played on the floor.

The woman recognized me. "Mr. Ashby, I'm so ashamed." The tears started to roll. "We aren't beggars. We aren't lazy people. We have some pride. We are working people, but we have no more to eat. And I haven't got coal enough to burn tomorrow. What can I do, Mr. Ashby? We aren't chiselers. We're working people, honest people. We had a little bank account. See, here is the book.

"We had saved \$106. But my husband took sick. He's been sick now nigh five weeks. The doctor, the rent, the medicine, food and coal. It's all gone, the last penny."

"Where's your husband now?"

"In bed in that room. Mr. Ashby, please don't say anything to make him feel bad. He's a good man to me. He loves me and the children. He's worried because he's afraid that his children will go hungry. He's scared too that he might not have his job back when he gets well."

The bedroom was about the same size as the dining room.

No lamp was lit there. The only light was that which came through the two windows from a street lamp. There was a small stove. If it had any fire at all, it was so low that the heat emitted would not be felt for more than a foot from it.

"I'll beat this thing," the fellow blurted out. "Doctor said mine was a bad case of pneumonia. He almost gave up on me once. But I'm not going to die. My children need me. Be back on my job in two weeks."

"I wouldn't rush it if I were you," I warned in the best consoling tone that I knew. "You might have a relapse. Then you would be worse off than ever."

"But I must get out of this house. Mister, I must go to work. Winter's tipping up on us. Coal, everything to buy. I'm not going to let my children starve to death."

"Where do you work?" I asked.

"Tobacco company."

"Which one?"

"Lewis's, Twelfth Avenue."

"Did you notify them of your illness?"

"Yes, Sir, I sent word to the foreman by one of the boys."

"Well," said I, "here's what I shall try to do for you. First

thing in the morning, I shall go to the Bureau of Associated Charities and request that they give you temporary food relief. I'll ask the overseer of the poor to send you a quarter ton of coal. I suppose that you do not have space to store more than a quarter ton at one time."

"That's right," the woman said.

"Fortunately for you, I know the president of the I. G. Lewis Tobacco Company. I'll see him and urge that he keep your job open for you until you can get back to it."

The assurance that I gave them in my promise of assistance restored, certainly to a large degree, their dignity. At least they no longer felt the stigma of being classed as lazy or paupers.

I arose to go. I went again in the dining room on my way out.

The woman closed the bedroom door silently behind her.

"Oh Mr. Ashby," she burst out, a smile all over her face, "you'll never know how much I thank you. I feel so happy, so satisfied now. You'll never be sorry for the help you gave us. We are good people, church people. Even now, I learn my children about the Bible. Poody," she said, addressing the little three-year-old boy playing on the floor, "tell Mr. Ashby who that man is on the picture."

I had not noticed when I first entered the room that on the wall was a replica on paper of Francesco Cossa's Crucifixion of Christ. In the dimly lighted room, the painting seemed odd. About the Master was an awesomeness and pity which I had not observed when I once saw the painting in a gallery. The girdle about his loins appeared wrinkled and dingy.

The boy did not immediately respond. Urged by the mother, these words came out in a volume far too heavy, I thought, for a child his age, and in a slow monotone: "That is Jesus Christ with a diaper on."

TALE 84

Newark operated a summer camp for underprivileged children at the seashore. It was called "Camp Avon by the Sea." The camp was open for six weeks during the summer. The first five weeks were for white children. The last week was for Negroes. That is the way all organizations with camp programs operated.

Randall Worden, director of recreation of the Board of Education, supervised the camp program. Even the tickets given to the children differed in color. I chided Worden about the ridiculousness of such separation, but added that I thoroughly understood the city's reasoning. Those who ran the city were

afraid that if the Negro children and the white children were put into the Atlantic Ocean at the same time, the current of the ocean would stop, the water would become stagnant and all the black would wash off the Negro children and stick on the whites, sending them home to their mothers either all black or deep purple.

Worden asked the Urban League to assist in the distribution of the tickets to Negro children in our area.

One morning a group of children, perhaps nine or 10, came into the office. They were from Colden Street. They were nine or 10 years of age.

The leader of the group was a rather dark little boy. "We want tickets to go to camp," he said.

In the group was one white boy. What would I do about him? Often I had met the problem of whites saying to the Negro child, "No, you can't do so-and-so. No, you can't go such-and-such a place. You're a colored boy."

Now I must discriminate against a white boy. I must do to him the very thing that I so violently railed being done to me.

Must I tell him the truth? I felt awful — a liar and a coward rolled into one.

I issued the tickets to the Negro children. The little leader, seeing what had happened, said to me, "You didn't give Tony none."

Now, more miserable than ever, I offered some excuse.

"But he's my friend," persisted the boy.

I tried to assure him that I would take care of Tony, that I would make a special trip to the City Hall to get a ticket for him.

"Come on, gang," commanded the little fellow.

When they got to the door, I heard a sudden stop. A voice said, "Wait a minute."

There was a shuffling of feet. The noise grew louder. They had reversed themselves. They were coming back to see me.

The leader stood staring at me for a minute. Then, literally throwing the small piece of cardboard in my teeth, he said, "Here, mister, take your ticket. If my friend can't go, I don't want to go."

In my long life, I have read many books, heard many lectures and sermons, seen many plays and heard much high-sounding music; all on the subject of brotherhood.

Of all these, the only one I remember is that which came from the dark lips of that little boy standing before me, his left arm

thrown over the shoulder of Tony, saying, "Here, mister, take your ticket. If my friend can't go, I don't want to go."

TALE 85

The Newark Evening News reported a strike had broken out at the Sayre and Fisher brick company in Sayreville.

Two days later, a man came to my office. I recognized him as one of two partners who operated a private employment firm. I knew something about the methods by which the company conducted its business. While it was true that they would round up workers where 50, 100, or more were needed on a new project, their real job was to bring in hordes of men to break a strike.

I had known them to bring in a trainload of laborers, rounded up in cities where there were large pools of unemployed. Also they sometimes went into the South, rounded up hundreds, and chartered boxcars they attached to freight trains in order to reduce the cost of transportation.

I was peeved even at the sight of the fellow. In response to my inquiry about what he wanted, he told me that he would like us to assist him in getting a large crew of men for a brickyard.

"Sayre and Fisher?" I asked.

"Well, yes."

I was mad at the man for presupposing my naivete. My resentment went almost to the boiling point because of his presumptuousness in the belief the Urban League would permit itself to be involved in a labor situation where a strike was occurring, thereby being charged as a strike-breaking organization. My parting words to him lacked much of my normal civility.

The next day, I had a call from the director of the Newark Chamber of Commerce. He asked me if I would accept a call from the director of the Chamber of Commerce of Middlesex County, the county in which Sayreville was located. I agreed.

The man asked me to assist him in building up a labor force for Sayre and Fisher.

Now I was really mad. It was as if a conspiracy had developed to put me and the Urban League in a position where we would be the targets for labor unions to shoot at.

"Why do you ask me to break a strike?" I shot at him.

"Mr. Ashby, I give you my word that the strike is over," he said.

"I have seen nothing of it in the papers," I replied angrily.

The next morning he called again. He asked me if I would agree to come to Sayreville to talk with George Fisher, the president of the brick company. "I have a car standing by. I'll send for you right away, if you will come."

Fisher's office was in a one-story brick building. The day was very hot. Three or four fans made half circles on their stanchions.

Fisher said, "Mr. Ashby, we are in great need to increase our labor force. We have been for some time. Now we are almost desperate. Above and beyond our regular trade, we have a contract to supply millions of whiteface bricks to be used in the stations of a new subway which they are just building in New York. We are way behind in our deliveries. They are pressing us. That telephone may ring any minute asking us to hurry. Our present working force is putting in all the overtime they can stand. Yet, we do not catch up.

"You see, practically all of our common laborers are either Hungarians or Poles. At one time, it was very easy for us to rebuild our labor needs with the same people. But as you know, since the war, the labor source from Eastern Europe has come to a complete halt. I asked friends of mine who operate brick-making plants in Peekskill, N.Y., and Baltimore, what their experiences had been in the use of colored laborers. Both assured me that they had been very satisfactory. I called in my superintendent and my foremen and told them that I was determined to go into the labor market and get colored men to take up our slack.

"When the workers heard this, they told the superintendent that they would strike if they brought Negroes in."

"You have a strike on now?" I said.

"Oh, no, Mr. Ashby. That strike was settled. We gave them the raise in wages they demanded."

"Why are they not at work?" I asked.

"Because they want a guarantee from me that I won't bring in any colored men to work here."

"Are you sure that is the reason?"

"I would not have you come all the way down here to tell you a lie."

"Give me a half-hour or so to make up my mind."

I went out of his office and walked a short distance into the town. Groups of men stood about on the streets talking. Not one

word of English did I hear. I walked past a grocery store. On the window were letters in Hungarian.

"This is hell," I thought. "It is humiliating enough for me to be forced to accept all sorts of debasements from the descendants of those who have been in the country for 100 years, and helped to build it. But these fellows just got here yesterday, so to speak. They knew only one sentence in English: 'Me no work with neegars.'"

I was faced with a situation which literally scared me to death. Fisher had given me his word the original strike had been settled. But suppose he were in error? Suppose the strike was still on, and I brought in men to crack it? Condemnation of me and the Urban League would be crushing.

But if I broke a strike that was protracted because the workers refused to work with men of a different color, thereby denying them the right to sell their labor and provide food for their families, would I have shown less regard for the rights of labor than did the strikers themselves?

As I walked through the streets of this little town, I asked myself, "Can the breaking of a strike ever be morally and legally justified? What kind of morality or legality is it that tells me that I must step aside and let a white man work because he is white, while he makes me stay idle and in want because I am a Negro? In short, here is what I had to answer for myself: In the light of labor ethics, if it is right for them to deny me the right to work because of my color, is it wrong for me to deny them the right to work by breaking their strike?" I returned to the brickyard.

"Mr. Fisher, here is my proposition to you. One, I will bring in as many men as you need. But you must pay them \$45 a week. That I know is \$5 more than you assert your men settled for.

"Two, you shall have to underwrite a fund sufficient for me to advertise in the Negro weekly newspapers, and also place placards all over Newark, telling men that jobs are open to them.

"Three, I will come down here for a week or 10 days, disguise myself as a worker and mingle with the men to assist them in their adjustment."

The company sent up trucks to pick up men in front of our building. In less than two weeks, several hundred men had reached Sayre and Fisher Co. for work.

Dr. Abram L. Harris, late professor of economics at the University of Chicago, in his book, "The Black Worker," charged me and the Urban League as strikebreakers. I think that I was only a color barrier-breaker.

TALE 86

On the second floor of a two-story house a couple doors from me lived a family. All the neighbors spoke of them as just Charlie and Sadie. If their last name was known to anyone, it was never used. He was English, a rather husky fellow. He had an artificial leg, the amputation the result of a wound in the war. The leg was either poorly made or ill-fitted. He wrenched his body as he walked, and his foot always came down with a "plop."

Sadie was an American Jew, quite tiny, with vision so poor as to need very heavy glasses.

Charlie owned a motorcycle with a sidecar. He was very clever in his manipulation of the vehicle. Indeed, some of his stunts equalled those of a professional trick rider. He was also a bit of a show-off, driving the cycle at daredevil speed with the siren open full blast and, at the last moment, bringing it to an abrupt stop.

A pea-soup rain was falling when I got home about 7 o'clock. Mary was standing on the back porch talking to a neighbor across the fence. "Sadie upstairs is in deep labor pains. She's got to go to the hospital," she said to me when she came in.

"Why doesn't her husband take her in his sidecar?" I asked.

"You know no woman in labor could ride in a sidecar," she answered reprovingly.

"Why doesn't Charlie call a cab?"

"They have no phone."

"I'll see if I can get a cab." I called three or four taxi companies — All busy.

The neighbor called across the fence to Mary. "That woman is in dreadful pain."

Mary answered, "I'll get my husband to take her."

I drove the 50-odd feet to Charlie's front door.

The women, fearful of Charlie's clumsiness because of his artificial leg, went upstairs and brought Sadie down. They seated her as comfortably as possible in the rear seat of our car.

Charlie got in beside her and drew her to him. Her groans, wracked by pain, were frightening.

I drove at a speed that would reduce the bouncing of the car to a minimum. "Charlie! Charlie! It hurts so," she moaned.

"Take it easy, Sadie, take it easy. We're on our way." With his big left hand, he patted her shoulder.

Two blocks gone. "Charlie! Charlie! Here comes that sharp pain again! Help me! Help me, Charlie!"

"Take it easy! Take it easy, Sadie. I know it hurts, but take it easy. We're getting there."

Supposing that the delivery would be in the City Hospital as it would cost less there than in a private institution, I headed that way. I went through Branch Brook Park, a route that would be practically free of all traffic stops.

"Charlie! Charlie! I can't stand it no more! I can't stand it!"

I was scared to death. Suppose she had the baby in my car? I had heard that doctors give women enemas before childbirth. Sadie would have no such professional service. There would be excrement, urine, blood, a naked baby. God! My car would be ruined. It was a Pontiac, the first car I had ever owned. And I had made but one payment on it. Moreover, the sight of blood sickens me.

Charlie hollered, "Say, where are you going?"

"City Hospital," I called back.

"It ain't the City. I've made arrangements for her at Beth Israel."

"Charlie! Charlie! I'm going to die! I'm going to die! I know it."

"God!" I thought, "suppose she did die? Suppose the baby came and both died? Could they bring any legal charge against me for her death? Could they say that I was an accessory to the fact?"

I turned and sped out of the park on Bloomfield Avenue. At High street, I turned off to make a bee-line across town to Beth Israel Hospital. I got to High Street and Springfield Avenue. I was pocketed behind a trolley car. Cars were coming down Springfield Avenue toward the center of the town for the theater hour. I would be wedged in a good three or four minutes. I pulled from behind the trolley car and started across the street. An officer, dressed in a white rubber hat, raincoat and boots, stood in the middle of the street, a spotlight beaming down upon him. Vociferously, he blew his whistle and threw up a warning hand: "Hey! Where the hell you going? Get back! Get back!"

I leaned out the window. "Woman in the back going to have a baby."

He blew again. With a sweeping motion, he bade me go ahead.

"Charlie! Charlie! I tell you I'm going to die. Do something! Stop this pain, Charlie. I'm going to die."

This was it. This surely was it. I had never seen any one die. Now it was to take place right in my car. As I drove along the lighted city streets, I was, so far as I knew, in the deep blackness of the darkest jungle.

"Take it easy, Sadie, take it easy, old girl. Ain't far now."

There was but one possible obstacle now. A spur of the Lehigh

Valley Railroad crossed Elizabeth Avenue at Hawthorne Avenue. It carried freight, a lot of freight. It was always heaviest at night. I might be held up 10 minutes there. Within hearing distance of the railroad, I heard the shunting of cars. "That's it. I'm trapped," I thought. Three blocks away, I could see that the gate was down. A red light was swinging on its end. What to do now? I kept on. Just as I got there, the gate lifted. Three, certainly not more than five minutes, and I would be at Beth Isreal.

I sped down the ramp of the hospital. I jumped out and ran to the desk. In garbled words I told them my plight.

Immediately two attendants with a conveyor started on a run with me. Sadie was no longer ambulatory. As cautiously as possible, they eased her on the truck and started toward the elevator in the basement.

The next morning about 8 o'clock, I stepped out my back door. Charlie was standing on his porch, about to plop-plop downstairs. "Hello, Mr. Ashby! It's a boy — seven pounds, nine ounces. Born 20 minutes after Sadie got in bed."

TALE 87

The Urban League treasury, as summer of 1920 approached, was dwindling. It would perhaps allow salaries and other expenses through July. After that, it would be as empty as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard. I proposed to the board of directors that we sponsor a concert, with Roland Hayes as the artist. There was some strong opposition to my proposal from the Negro members of the board.

Their reasons were valid. The great musical talent of Hayes was known to many of us.

But practically all his concerts had been before strictly Negro audiences, sponsored by a church, lodge, YMCA or college in the South. To expect that white people would come out and pay to hear a serious Negro artist sing arias and the works of the great masters, was not only absurd — it was ridiculous.

We would have to pay Hayes perhaps \$150. Add to this the cost of his transportation from the point where he gave his last concert, one night's lodging and board, the cost of the hall, the printing of advertising and tickets, and we were easily up to the forbidding sum of \$250. If we failed to make this amount, then we would be forced by virtue of contracts to deplete further the little sum which was safely ours in the bank.

Undaunted, I told the board that even if it failed, it was worth it as a cultural venture. I argued further it was our obligation to do whatever we could to give the serious Negro artist a chance to be heard.

Perhaps the finest home owned by a Negro at that time was that of Dr. William H. Washington at 321 High Street. I was well acquainted with Mrs. Washington. I would ask her if she would accept Hayes in her home for a night. Mrs. Washington, a self-designated leader of the so-called "Negro society," would be delighted to have such an artist as her guest. We would be saved the cost of his lodging and board.

I had the good fortune of getting a very dedicated and active committee of women as sponsors and as ticket sellers. This, too, was the first time any affair for Negroes had tickets placed on sale in the theater sales booth of Bamberger's.

The concert was held in the auditorium of Central High School. The night was beautiful. People came by the hundreds from everywhere. I remember one very distinguished patron, W. C. Handy.

I was standing in the lobby, greeting the patrons when one of the committee came to me. "Mr. Handy, I want you to meet our executive secretary, Mr. Ashby."

"Not Mr. Handy of the blues," I exclaimed in delight.

"I'm him," he smiled in return.

This concert was the jumping-off point to Roland Hayes' international fame. It gave him the money to go to England and France, where he gave concerts and where, after more than a decade of bouncing around in this land of his birth, forced to sing only to Negro audiences, he was discovered and acclaimed by the great European musicians.

For 20 years thereafter, his was perhaps the most often heard voice on the concert stage of any male singer in the western world.

TALE 88

For two or three years, business executives, social workers, clergymen and others discussed the possibility of the formation of a community fund which would collect and dispense funds for the operations of all social agencies. Opinions were adamant both for and against it.

Agencies with strong boards of directors, men and women of influence and affluence, were dead set against it. They had no

difficulty in raising the budget of their particular organizations for their so-called "pet charities."

As individuals, they had dire fears that much, if not all of their influence and the responsibility they exercised in their particular agencies would be submerged or wiped out if these obligations were taken over by some super-body. But for most agencies, the struggle to keep the programs alive was continuous and sometimes very disheartening.

The Urban League, by the very nature of its objectives, could not draw to it as board members the wealthy and influential people.

Moreover, its story was very hard to tell. It was not easy to get a prospective donor both enthusiastic and responsive by telling him that the purpose of the league was to obtain for Negroes more and better jobs, to find better houses for them to live in, to get them better health services, to give them the chance for wholesome recreation, and to have them fit in as responsible citizens in the community. Not alone were those things at that time abstractions, they were impossibilities — stuff that dreams are made of.

For instance, the Urban League had a budget of \$5,000. Practically all of that I had to raise myself. Thus, I would say, 60 per cent of my time went to fund-raising to keep the organization alive. The remaining time was devoted to trying to make real the programs.

I welcomed the founding of a community fund to relieve me of the constant agony and uncertainty of where the money would come from to meet the next month's obligations.

The time came for a final decision on whether or not a community fund would become a reality. It was a hot day. The meeting took place in the Female Charities Building at Halsey and Hill streets. Some of the people in attendance were Louis Bamberger, Rudolph Conklin, M. O. Price, J. Nelson Carter, Mrs. J. G. Spurr, Miss Louise Shugard, Miss J. Isabelle Sims and Rabbi Solomon Foster. A fellow from the Ironbound Community Center and I were the only social workers in attendance.

The meeting was about to begin. Mrs. Spurr spoke up: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is a meeting at which a very grave decision must be made for our city. I think, therefore, we should open it with a prayer for guidance from the Almighty God. I ask Rabbi Foster to lead us in prayer."

It was 10 o'clock. The meeting see-sawed back and forth for two hours. Sometimes it appeared that a decision was imminent.

Then the whole thing would veer off and no one seemed to know how to get back to the point. There was, at times, very little calm, less reason. Words were hot and not always kind.

I was given the opportunity to state my opinion.

About 2:30, Conklin said, "I've had enough of this wrangling and indecision. I have had no lunch. I'm going."

Bamberger was quick to get to his feet. "Oh, no, you're not going. I've had no lunch either. You're going to stay here like the rest of us and see this thing through one way or the other."

A vote was taken about 3 o'clock. It was an affirmative vote. Thus came into being the Newark Welfare Federation and Community Chest.

Of all the people who were present at that organization meeting, I am now the only one alive.

TALE 89

On another occasion, a few years later, I sat at my rolltop desk reading the mail. The telephone rang.

"Hello, Ashby? This is Charley Stevens, Boston. Say, listen. Roland Hayes is coming into Newark this morning from Pittsburgh. Meet him at the station and take care of him overnight." He cut himself off.

"What is this?" I asked myself. "What is he talking about? What does he expect me to do?"

Charley Stevens was a prominent attorney in Boston. Hayes was one of his clients. Stevens and I were graduates of Lincoln University.

I had read an article in the Pittsburgh Courier which stated Hayes had given a concert in Pittsburgh on the Saturday night before. I knew he would perform at a concert in Carnegie Hall on Tuesday night.

But what did all this have to do with me? Three railroad companies came into Newark. As Stevens had given me not even a smattering of information, I reasoned the only sensible thing to do was to look into the stations of all three.

I went into the station of the Central Railroad. My glance of the large oblong room was quick, but thorough. He was not there.

I got on a trolley bound for the Lackawanna Station up Broad Street. He was not there.

As I stepped off the trolley car on Market Street in front of the Pennsylvania Station, I saw a young man taking very slow steps on the sidewalk.

I recognized him immediately. He was Hayes' secretary.

He came to me, a smile on his face, offered his hand, and greeted: "Good morning, Mr. Ashby. Glad to see you. Mr. Hayes is in the waiting room."

About three-quarters of the way down the room, I saw Hayes sitting on one of the long oak benches. He was dressed in a fawn colored camel's hair overcoat, the first one I had ever seen made of such material, and certainly the most attractive and opulent piece of wearing apparel I had ever seen on a human being. He was a diminutive man, and seemed almost swallowed up by the bulky folds of the garment. He was obviously very happy to see me as he stood up and greeted me.

"You did get a message from Mr. Stevens, my attorney in Boston?"

"Yes, just a while ago. But he told me nothing. Why did he tell me to meet you?"

"I want to stay in Newark overnight."

Now my puzzlement deepened. He was giving a concert in New York tomorrow night. Why did he not go to New York and stay for the night?

He was dead tired from traveling and performing. In New York he would be besieged with calls and telephones from friends and acquaintances. In Newark, where he was less known, he could have absolute and unbroken repose and relaxation.

"Well," I said, "perhaps Mrs. Washington, in whose home you were a guest when we presented you in a concert some years ago, would still welcome you."

"Oh! No! No!" he objected, raising his hand. "I want to get away from the center of town, out where no one knows me. You see, Mrs. Washington, I am sure, would spread the word around among her friends."

Finally I said, "Well, I live in North Newark. I am sure there is no one around out there who knows you. My house is not a fine one. Indeed, it is very plain. But I live there, and there is no one now alive or who was ever even born who is any better than I am."

He smiled. Then he asked to call a cab.

Before doing so, I went to the telephone to call my wife, Mary, to tell her that I was bringing Hayes home to stay overnight. I did not give her time to ask questions for I was sure that she would be slightly awed by the responsibility of such a celebrity.

When we reached home, at 53 Irving St., I jumped out, and with Hayes, I went to the door to deliver him into her hands. He,

of course, remembered her and greeted her with courtly grace.

Mary asked Hayes what he would like for dinner. "A little girl like you could not cook the thing I would like most," he replied.

"I could try," she said. "Tell me what you want."

"I should like a boiled, southern cured ham and some collard greens cooked in the ham water," he said. She knew about southern cured ham. Her maternal grandfather was the owner of vast farmlands in Virginia and always sent hams up to his daughter, Mary's mother, in Hopewell. But of collard greens she had never heard. Who in a small town in inland New Jersey knew anything about such an exotic vegetable as collard greens?

We had two very dear neighbors and friends, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Matt. He was a fireman and worked out of Engine Company Number 13, on the corner of Halleck Street and Summer Avenue.

Mary went to Mrs. Matt and told her about the famous artist in our house and about his request for dinner.

Mrs. Matt, like Mary, had never heard of collard greens. "Maybe my Eddie knows," she said.

She telephoned him. "Sure, I know what they are," came his response.

"Where can you get them?" asked Mrs. Matt.

"In the market in Broome Street, over on 'The Hill.'"

"The Hill" was a section of Newark, densely populated with Jews and Negroes and a smattering of Poles and Hungarians. Broome Street, from Springfield Avenue to West Kinney Street, had hundreds of small merchants doing their business on pushcarts or on little stands extending out from dilapidated buildings on to the sidewalk. Here one could buy all sorts of foodstuffs, chinaware, clothing, light bulbs, even furniture.

Because of the concentration of Negroes, many merchants specialized in southern foods.

On his lunch, Matt went to Broome Street. He returned with a southern cured ham and a quarter bushel of collard greens, each leaf as big as an elephant's ear.

Mary and Mrs. Matt prepared the dinner.

Hayes ate ravenously. When he had finished, he complimented Mary for the excellence of the meal. His secretary said Hayes had not eaten so much at one meal in two years. After dinner, Mary and Hayes took a walk around the block.

The next afternoon, a shiny black limousine pulled up in front of our house. It had a New York license. A chauffeur in livery

drove it. There was one passenger. The chauffeur stepped out and came to the door. He held Hayes' arm as they walked to the car. They got in. Off they went to New York.

Some months later my wife and daughter and I went to New York on a Sunday to have dinner.

We had finished our dinner, and were on our way out. We had to pass through an outer room in which guests waited. Someone called, "Hey, Bill."

I turned. It was Harry Bragg, an old classmate of mine in Lincoln University. He was now making his way very rapidly as a lawyer in Harlem.

"That's a fast one you pulled with Roland Hayes," he said.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Aw come on, Bill — don't be coy; don't play dumb."

"What are you talking about?" I asked again.

"Didn't Roland Hayes stay at your house?"

"Yes."

"And you don't know about Roland and Crystal Byrd?"

Crystal Byrd was a very beautiful woman, perhaps in her late 20s. A member of the national staff of the Young Women's Christian Association, she was cultured, intellectual, a brilliant speaker. She was in great demand at gatherings all over the country.

Mary told me Roland Hayes and Crystal Byrd had been engaged to be married. At some point, Hayes called off the engagement. Embarrassed, chagrined, and hurt, Crystal sued him for a breach of promise in the New York courts. This meant he could be arrested and perhaps incarcerated if found in the state.

In some way attorneys for Hayes obtained some sort of court order which dispensed with the penalties, allowing Hayes to be in the state certain hours without molestation. That is why he did not spend the night in New York and also why he did not leave my house until 5 o'clock the evening of the concert at Carnegie Hall. When the concert was over, a limousine would be at a rear door. He had but to run out, jump in, and be whisked across the state border into Connecticut and be home free.

Harry insisted I knew all of this and I was therefore a conspirator in protecting Roland Hayes. In half humor, half sincerity, he labeled me the culprit who muddled up the breach of promise suit of Crystal Byrd against Roland Hayes.

TALE 90

Carl Bannwart was a dear, dear friend, and one of the finest human beings that I have ever known. He was director of the Newark Shade Tree Commission, and was an expert on things a long time before this phase of ecology thrust itself into public attention all over this land. He was an avid and dedicated Lincoln-phile.

"Bill," he said to me, "you are going out to Springfield, Illinois, the home and resting place of Abraham Lincoln. You know the depth of my devotion and the height of my admiration for the great man. You know, too, that I collect and save every scrap of paper and any other facts about him that I can get my hands on or that I hear. In his home town, you will learn some things about him that I do not know. I'll greatly appreciate it if you will send to me anything that you can learn that would be of any value to me."

I lived in the home of a Mrs. S. A. Taborn while I waited for my wife, Mary, and my daughter, Kathryn, who was in her senior year in Barringer High School, to join me in Illinois.

I had been in Springfield for about a month in 1932, when I told my hostess about my friend, Carl Bannwart. I stated that I would like to go to Lincoln's Tomb, and asked how I might get there. Mrs. Taborn assured me that reaching the tomb from her house was very simple. She said, "Just walk out to Fifth Street and get a trolley car going south. It will take you right to the tomb."

I remember it vividly. It was the afternoon of the last Saturday in March. The day was pleasantly clear. The temperature just slightly cool, but devoid of the chill to warrant even a topcoat.

I boarded the trolley at Fifth and Jackson streets. It was about half filled with passengers. When it reached Fifth and Monroe, so many people got on that every seat was filled. The motorman drove the car at normal speed. We had not gone too many blocks when passengers began to get off, one by one or two at a time. I glanced around the trolley and discovered that I was the only person still aboard. Moreover, we had passed the part where houses were on both sides of the street, and instead, were now in a wholly unpopulated area. Somewhat anxious, perhaps slightly alarmed lest I be taken past the point to which I was bound, I arose, went up front to the motorman, and politely said, "I hope you didn't forget my stop, Lincoln's Tomb?" In an unemotional monotone he replied, "I didn't forget. I'll get you there. It ain't far now."

Reassured, my spirits soared high. Soon I would be in the

presence of the remains of one of the most illustrious beings who ever walked this earth. So high were my spirits that I could not resist communicating my exhilaration to my solitary companion.

Said I: "You are very fortunate to have such a great privilege to be able to get to the tomb of Abraham Lincoln so easily. I guess you go to see it about every day or so."

His reply completely deflated me. Very gruffly, and without batting an eye, he replied: "Hell, no, I ain't seen the damned place in 20 years."

TALE 91

Kathryn was going to college. She had always known that she would go. She looked forward to it with pleasant anticipation.

She would go to the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

I was now in Springfield, Illinois, having gone there in 1932 as executive secretary of the Springfield Urban League.

The night before she was to go, we sat in our living room. We were still strangers, having been in town but a few months, and were not yet acquainted with too many people. I said:

"Kid, you're going off to college tomorrow. We have tried to prepare you for that. Still, it may prove a baffling experience for you. You will be one among perhaps 15,000 other young people, not one of whom you have ever seen before. They will be doing things which you have never done. Smoking, for instance. It seems that girls are becoming smokers in colleges now. Indeed, I think that I read recently that the University of Illinois has set up a salon in which girls may go and smoke, the first institution to do so in the nation. I hope that you won't smoke. Mind you, I'm not condemning it. It is neither moral, immoral, nor amoral. But there is about it something which I think just does not fit you. I may say that in my day at college, a girl who smoked was for us an invitation to take liberties. But if you think you ought to smoke, you will do so. We can do nothing about it. We are 90 miles away.

"Some students will be drinkers. You know that mother and I were never much as drinkers. I hope you won't drink. Here again, I must remind you, I do not pass judgment. I say nothing about whether it is right or wrong. The decision must be yours. As I said before, we are 90 miles away. One thing above all you must do in this connection: You must never give the impression of a 'holier-than-thou' attitude to your fellow students if they are drinkers. One other thing you must not do: You must not condemn them for what they feel they have the right to do. Now you will be suspect if

you hold yourself aloof from them. But if you can stick it out for a few months during which you can convince them that you are not passing judgment on their conduct, but as for yourself, you just don't think you want the stuff, they will accept you as real and not a phony.

"You are a very attractive girl. Boys will pay more attention to you than some of the other girls. I am told that there are many students there from Chicago and St. Louis. These are big cities. They may think of you as a small-town girl, even a country girl, a hick — therefore you are naive. They have been raised in different homes. Their standards of conduct may not be the same as yours. But never accentuate the difference. And, Kid, above all things, don't ever let them place upon you the tag of being a snob. They will make life miserable for you if you do. Talk with them, laugh with them, let their smutty jokes bounce off you as if you never heard them. Once you convince them that you are genuinely a nice girl, and that being nice is not a pretense, they will respect you and they will see to it that no one else molests you.

"You will, of course, do well in your work. But I shall not be in the least worried if you are not in the top 10 in your class. College ought to prepare one for life, and you can learn more of the things which will later be of value to you if you succeed in getting along well with your fellows than you can from all the books they will shove at you. Join the dramatic club, the French club, join in the bull sessions. I am giving you extra money to purchase a season ticket to athletic games. There's something exhilarating in joining a big crowd. There's something inspirational in rooting for the team. I hope that you won't think that I have preached to you tonight. Nor was it my intention to warn you. Certainly I would not wish you to be apprehensive. I am not sure that I have said the right things. Perhaps I should have remained quiet. But I am your father. I felt that I must say something. I trust you implicitly. I am sure that you will take care of yourself properly. This is a new experience for both of us, you being away from us. You have always been a good girl. You have given us countless hours of happiness. We are so glad that you are our child. You must call us at any moment that you even suspect there is a problem.

"There, now, I have talked a lot. Is there anything you would like to say?"

She replied: "Daddy, I will never do anything to make you and Mother ashamed of me."

TALE 92

I took a casual glance down at my fuel gauge on the dashboard of my Ford. My gas was down, way down, less than a quarter left in the tank. I did not panic. In fact, I was not in the slightest worried that the tank would be emptied before I could make it to a station where it could be refilled.

It was July 22, 1934, and I knew exactly where I was. I was traveling on Illinois State Highway 36. So often had I driven on this road that I was really intimately acquainted with all this vast flat farmland area through which I was going. Indeed, this was the highway which I frequently took when I was going over to the University of Illinois at Champaign to see Kathryn.

I knew the color, the shape of every house and barn within the level, unobstructed view of the highway. I could recall with no mental effort at all the height of a huge oak tree that stood in the front of a certain house, or the spread of a weeping willow on the side of another.

I played guessing-games on how many yards a house sat in off the road. I even remembered the ones with tree-lined driveways, whether that driveway was just plain black soil, or cinder-covered, or hard blacktop.

A mere two or three miles away was the village of Tuscola. Here was a Shell filling station. It stood at a junction where a secondary road, Number 45, branched off from the highway and went on north to Chicago.

I would fill up here. My fuel would then take me all the way to my destination, Pittsburgh, Pa., where I would attend a regional conference of the National Urban League.

Actually, it was more than a filling station. In the rather large two-story frame building was a grocery store which served as a trading post for the rural area. Also, there was a small lunchroom where one could get a bowl of hot canned soup, a hamburger, or a hot dog. A porch jutted out some 15-odd feet from the house. Under this porch were the tanks from which the gasoline was pumped.

Two men, having their car serviced, were standing on one side of the gas pumps when I drove in. They were both very husky. I judged them to be 25 or 30 years of age.

I stepped out. My feet were barely on the ground when a voice from an open door of the building called, "Pop, come here, quick!"

The operator shut off the hose to the automobile which he was filling. He took rather quick steps into the grocery department.

In less than two minutes, he was back, exclaiming "John Dillinger's been shot!"

"Dillinger," echoed one of the men.

"How do you know?"

"Just came over the radio."

"Dead!"

"Guess so."

"Oh, Christ. Why did they kill him?"

"Where'd it happen?"

"Chicago."

"That's good," I said.

I was looking at the two men. Their faces reddened. I had never seen such rapid transition on the countenance of any human being. It was like one of the enigmas of nature, when for instance a volcano without warning decides it will bury a town with its thick hot lava, or a flood wrenches houses from their foundations and sends them hurtling.

There was fury and deep anger in their faces.

"Don't crack wise," snapped one of them, his fierce gaze fixed upon me.

Somewhat cautious, and a little cowed, I said in a not-too-loud voice, "Well, he was a pretty bad fellow. He kept many people scared to death."

"Sure, he robbed banks. He robbed the rich. He never done nothin' to no poor people. Make another crack like that and I'll —"

They were now coming to me. I backed away. I sensed my danger. One more word from me, either in praise of or condemnation of John Dillinger, would have been equally fatal. These two strong young men would have mauled me into insensibility.

I had not been on the road again very long before I came to the Illinois-Indiana state line. Terre Haute was but a few miles south from me. This was John Dillinger territory.

As I drove along, I pondered the conscience and character of those two young men. I was sure that they did not have any greater knowledge of Dillinger than did I, that they had never seen him, that all they knew of him were the very things which everyone knew from newspapers, radio broadcasts — his absolute disregard and contempt for all the rules necessary to be followed in any decent, livable society.

Yet, at this news of his death, they showed grief, honest grief. They knew, as did everyone, of his robberies, murders, his extravagant boasts which sent paralyzing fears into a whole city.

Yet, for all of these things, they said not one word of disapproval. They saw nothing wrong in this. They applauded his exploits. They strenuously and openly rushed to defend him. They pardoned his brutality and seemed to glorify his sadism. To him they would attach themselves as meek and submissive devotees.

Now I seemed to understand how easy it is to become a Robin Hood with a mob of pillaging hangmen, a John Dillinger, with his hordes of murderers, or even a Hitler with his storm troopers bent on the damnation of the whole human race.

TALE 93

Lake Springfield was built five miles south of the city. It was a large lake, one of the largest artificial lakes in the United States. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), seeking to make work for starving men during the Depression, made a grant of the enormous sum necessary to complete such a gigantic project. Engineers came in, tied together a few small bodies of stagnant water and a few creeks, and made a lovely waterway for swimming, fishing, and boating. All the funds having come from the federal government, I naturally assumed that all the pleasures which the lake provided would be open to all. But among some who knew the town's customs more accurately than I did, inquiries arose.

A group of young people came to me and asked if they would be permitted to go swimming in the lake. Immediately there flashed into my mind a picture of the great number of miles which would make up the perimeter of the body of water. I was tempted to say facetiously that a vast army, each soldier stationed 10 feet from each other, would be needed to keep anyone out of the water who wanted to go in. But I soberly answered "Yes."

Doubts having arisen in the minds of these youths, I then decided that the positive answer must come from the only one in authority to give it: the mayor of the city. In a long conference with Mayor John W. Kapp, I pointed out some of the fears and misgivings, and I emphasized that it was the federal government's money that was spent, neither the city nor the state putting in any sizable sum.

Mayor Kapp gave me the unqualified assurance that the question of discrimination had never even arisen in the mind of a single city official. The benefits of Lake Springfield would be enjoyed by all.

But concern and apprehensions among Negroes grew. Adults discussed it. Born in the minds of a few was the conviction that it would be a mistake for Negroes to go to the lake and go in swimming with white people. The leader of this opposition view was one Arthur

Clem. He came to me and assailed me for advocating and pushing my views. He told me that I was an outsider, that I was from the East; that I could not do in Springfield the things I had done in the East. He added that Negroes knew what they were doing and were satisfied with their mode of life. Then with a threat, he said very positively that if I did not like the way things were done here, I'd better pack up and go back where I came from.

I would hesitate to classify Arthur Clem as an out-and-out "Uncle Tom." He had witnessed an awful race riot that had taken place in Springfield in 1908. He had seen massacred and maimed bodies strewn over the streets. He had a genuine fear that if there were to be at the lake such race mixing as I encouraged, the awful holocaust would be repeated.

Arthur Clem worked for the State of Illinois. He was a messenger in one of the departments in the State Capitol. He presented one of those strange inexplicable cases with which almost every Negro is familiar. He had a daughter, Helen. She was a graduate of the University of Illinois with a brilliant scholastic record. I tried to make for her a position as teacher in the city schools. I was well acquainted with Harry V. Coe, the president of the school board. Mr. Coe very generously gave me a conference at which I urged the appointment of Miss Clem.

He was noncommittal. But he was open-minded. I felt that I had made some progress as I left him. I was able to enlist the cooperation of Mrs. Logan Hay, a beautiful, lovely, and liberal lady. Her husband, Logan Hay, was a descendant of John Hay, a law partner of Abraham Lincoln. He was the acknowledged first citizen of Springfield.

Mr. Coe let it be known that he was thinking very seriously of presenting the name of Miss Clem to the school board for confirmation. The school principals learned of this. They banded themselves together in opposition. Each, in defiant words, sent out his ultimatum that he would not have her in his school as a teacher. Thus, the girl who had been a shining product of the Springfield school system was denied the opportunity to teach in it. Arthur Clem knew that this had happened to his daughter. Yet he was fearful, or at least unwilling to take up cudgels and battle against the abominable practices.

But I was not left high and dry alone. Strongly supporting me in my program on Lake Springfield was Dr. Dec E. Webster, a Negro dentist. Dr. Webster was the president of the Springfield Branch of the NAACP. He was a fierce and unflinching protagonist in the cause of civil rights.

The day came for the formal opening of the lake. It would take place at the beach house.

I bought a bathing suit from Myers Brothers Department Store. After the ribbon-cutting and a few speeches, we all ran for the water. I had known only the sand at the bottom of the ocean along the Jersey Coast and at Coney Island. Now, as I walked out, my feet were almost mired in a thick heavy goo — yellow mud that oozed through one's toes. Soon the water all about us was discolored, the shade of dried corn stalks. As to a good swim, I certainly would not classify this as one of the best I ever had.

About a half-dozen Negro youths were in the water. One I remember, Jack Goren, was an absolutely fearless fellow.

The afternoon went beautifully. We did not talk to the whites; nor did they to us. But I do not remember any menacing looks. I do not remember any lips which seemed to say, "This is my lake — what are you doing in it?"

I went home exultant. I had witnessed a demonstration in racial harmony and tolerance, and I had been a part of it.

The telephone was ringing as I went up the steps to my office the next morning. I hastened to catch it.

Came a voice: "Mr. Ashby, this is Mayor Kapp. I've had a terrible night. Haven't slept a wink. My phone has rung all night. I received threats to my person, my family, my house, and my political career will be at an end if Negroes are permitted to go into the lake again. I want to ask you to call your people off until I can work out a plan for you."

My answer: "Hell, no!"

TALE 94

Joe Louis was going to fight Jack Sharkey, the former heavyweight champion, in 1936. Louis had not yet won the title, and this would be his first fight on the comeback trail after his ignoble beating by Max Schmeling in June. I had not seen Joe fight. Now was my chance. It would be my vacation time. I would go to New York for the fight. I had mixed feelings: If Joe lost the fight, I would be there at his demise; if he won, I could say that I was present at his triumph on the way up again.

On my way to the fight, I stopped off in Harlem to try to pick up some friends to go along with me. No luck. The mood of Negroes everywhere had never been before, nor has it been since the same as at that moment. They were literally paralyzed mentally, emotionally,

physically. A powerful, indescribable fear clutched them.

There was also something beyond and above fear. But they did not know what it was. Joe Louis, their idol, had proven that he had clay feet. The German had torn him to pieces. Joe was to be their Moses. He would give the universal Negro a lift. He had failed them. He had been knocked out. Now, he was out for a second chance; a chance for a comeback. Suppose he lost again? Every Negro in the land would want to jump into a grave and pull the loose soil over him.

They were desperately afraid that he might lose. Not one wanted to be seen on the streets if Joe met his second defeat. Never has a street in Harlem been so completely devoid of people. I walked from 134th Street to 136th Street on Seventh Avenue, trying to find some one from whom I could get a match to light a cigarette. I didn't see a soul, except someone rushing to his apartment, intent on getting in his house in a hurry.

The crowd at the Yankee Stadium for the fight was not large. No one paid any attention to his seat number. The cluster of people, both white and Negro, men and women, sat over the ringside.

In the first round, Joe sparred, a feeling-out process. The second round was a bit more aggressive, Joe taking the lead. In the third round, he cut loose at the ringing of the bell.

Sharkey went flat on his back. The referee started to count. Sharkey rolled over and got up on his hands and knees.

A man near me leaped up. In tones heavy with a West Indian accent, he bellowed, "That's right, Joe! You got him! You got him! Keep his ass to the sun! Keep his ass to the sun!"

TALE 95

John Mueth was president of the Springfield Urban League. He and Mrs. Mueth had a son, then in his 20s. He was retarded, had been from birth. Never did parents give greater devotion, love and hope for their offspring.

On occasions, the annual meeting of the board of directors of the League would be a dinner meeting. After the business meeting, we would go to a church or auditorium where a public ceremony would take place. The dinner was held in what we called a recreation room. It really was a converted stable, but very comfortable and reasonably attractive. It was continually in use for dances and other recreational programs for the youth, and also for meetings of a more serious nature for adults. Almost always every member of the board came to

the dinner. The food was excellent, prepared by one of the women's organizations affiliated with the League.

We had learned of a blind Negro girl who was an inmate in the Illinois State Institution for the Blind at Jacksonville, Illinois. We were told that she possessed a beautiful voice, and that she delighted in singing in churches, before organizations and so forth. I was instructed to invite her to be the guest at our dinner meeting.

When the dinner was over, her vocal coach and counselor said that she would like to sing for us "The Lord's Prayer."

I have never been too sure of the degree of my critical judgment in measuring the greatness of an artist in the delivery of a song.

This I know: Never before or since have I heard "The Lord's Prayer" sung with the pathos, sincerity and adoration of this girl.

When she finished, everyone in the room jumped up and applauded.

Mrs. Mueth shot from her table and hurried to the girl. She grasped the girl's hand. Her other arm she threw around the shoulder of the blind guest. A gush of tears rushed to her eyes.

In between her sobs, I heard her say, "Bless you! Bless you! That was beautiful. God has been very good to you. He gave you a great gift, the gift of song. Please ask the Virgin Mother to remember my boy, my sick boy."

She left \$20 in the hand of the blind girl.

TALE 96

The Illinois Bell Telephone Co. planned to erect a building that would serve as the headquarters for its operations in central Illinois. I made a firm resolution that I would do everything possible to see that some Negroes were employed in some capacity in this new building.

On the board of directors of the League was one M. J. Kellner. Mr. Kellner was a food broker, said to be the largest in the state outside of Chicago. As much of his business was done on the telephone, he was one of the Bell company's largest subscribers. I talked with him about making an opening for employment in the company. He reacted with immediate enthusiasm. Said he: "Here's what I'll do. I'll call the manager over. To make sure that he comes, I'll hint that I want to discuss expansion of my telephone service. You will be here. You can tell him what your plans are."

As soon as I made my requests known, the manager went on the defensive. He asked me to tell him how many Negro

subscribers there were to the telephone company in Springfield. Of course I did not know. Had it been the Springfield City Directory, I could have given him a positive answer. I could have counted them. The City Directory, a publication made periodically by the R. H. Donnelly Company of Chicago, designated all Negroes with a little (c) in parentheses after their names. Happily, the telephone company had not sunk that low in the humiliation of a human being.

The manager then came on with the very obvious, but very weak dodge that he was powerless to make decisions; that the matter would have to be approved by the parent office in Chicago.

Mr. Kellner was not easily brushed aside. "Look," he said, "Mr. Ashby is not asking you for jobs as the president of the company. But there must be other things, maintenance men, messengers or the like, that you could hire his people for. And I don't think it's right for you to ask Mr. Ashby how many colored people have telephones. You don't know in the company. How do you think he'd know? And even if he did, he's not asking you to employ Negroes on any quota scale. You must be kidding when you tell me that everybody that you employ will have to be passed on by your superiors in Chicago. You're the manager. They would not put you here as that unless they had confidence in your ability to hire personnel that would make your office a successful one."

The Illinois Bell Telephone Co., in its Springfield headquarters, hired four Negro men in the maintenance department. It is said that these four were the first Negroes that the Bell Telephone companies in the United States had employed in any capacity in any city in the North.

TALE 97

We lived at 1013 East Monroe St. in Springfield. It was a six-room, one-family frame building, painted a drab, dull, dark, depressing gray.

The house stood less than 100 feet from the tracks of the Wabash Railroad. From any point in the front of the house we could look across the street and see the Wabash Station (now abandoned) from which Abraham Lincoln left on his journey to Washington, there to take up the onerous responsibilities as President of the United States.

At the top of a steel stanchion was a plaque on which had been inscribed Lincoln's mournful parting address.

It cannot be said that the citizens of Springfield showed any

enthusiastic concern about the appearance of this monument to their world-famous son. By now, more than three-quarters of a century had passed since the martyred President stood on this spot.

The upright stanchion itself had been bent to a very noticeable degree — hit, perhaps, by a speeding automobile gone out of control.

Also visible at several feet away were scales of rust that had peeled off, and even in between his immortal words were what appeared to be small pot marks, the inevitable residue of eight decades of hot and cold winds, snow, ice, rain, sun, fog.

We had a dog — of what breed I do not know. It was not more than a hand high and leaned toward obesity. It was short-haired. It was pure white. It was a female. Its name was Churchill. When snoopers asked me why we would name a female dog Churchill, my snappy tongue-in-cheek retort always was that her first name was “Winstonia.” She was a little beast of startling intelligence. Even in the things she ate she showed selectivity. She loved asparagus. She loved broccoli. If Churchill was shown a box containing ice cream, she went wild, shaking herself and begging until her portion was put on her plate and set down before her. Call this statement preposterous and silly, if you will or must. I still proclaim it as my belief. Indeed I would bet all the tea in China on it for her actions so obviously confirmed it. I am convinced that Churchill knew when Friday came. On Fridays, Mary always prepared a package to send to Kathryn at the University. In it, she would send broiled calf’s liver, or lamb chops, or sirloin steak, baked potatoes, some fruit, cookies, or a good portion of pound cake.

A trolley line ran between Springfield and Champaign-Urbana. A very kind clerk in the post office had informed us that if we got the package to him at a certain time, he would stamp it and place it on the trolley. We had only to notify Kathryn and she could be waiting for it and pick it up the same day, sometimes while the contents were still warm. Thus all risks of spoilage were removed.

When Church (we shortened her name) saw Mary start to wrap up the package she went absolutely beside herself. She would bark, whine, wiggle herself as though she were going to shake herself apart. For a second she would sit and watch Mary at work. A questioning bark or whine would come from her little red mouth. Then with a burst of speed she would take off to the front door

and paw at it. When all was ready, Mary would say "Come on, Church, we're going to the post office to send Kathryn her dinner."

The little beast would shoot out of the front door and run as fast as her short legs would take her to the first street intersection. It was a dangerous intersection, for it was the point at which Route 66, a national highway, crossed East Monroe Street and went on to the far West, even to California. When she reached the intersection, she would sit and wait until Mary gave the word to cross the street. She would scoot across, turn around, sit down and wait until Mary safely arrived.

Further proof of her intelligence was manifest by the fact that she knew the exact boundary lines of the lot on which our house stood. She would go to the curb but never step into the street. She was the absolute ruler of her domain. No trespassing dog or cat could stay a minute on the land she had arrogated to herself to rule over. On warm late afternoons and evenings we sat on the front porch. She was always there with us, exercising her prerogative as a sentinel ready to challenge and ward off unannounced intruders. One evening after dinner I sat on the porch smoking. Mary was still in the kitchen, not yet having finished with the dinner dishes. On the lawn in front of the porch was a rather large circular bed of very red petunias. In full blossom the flowers were a magnet for passing dogs or cats.

I saw a large brown dog, a Doberman pinscher, come on the lawn and start toward the petunia bed. Church was lying down beside me. She had not seen the trespasser. Suddenly she sniffed her nose and sprang up. She saw the invader. With a loud bark she leaped toward the intruder. The frightened and surprised dog took off in a run. Church chased it to her boundary line, stopped and gave one warning bark. The Doberman was perhaps 15 or 20 feet from her. It stopped and looked back. I have always imagined that that dog said to itself "I'm a fool, a big dog like me running from a little mutt like that."

In very angry revenge it took out after Church. She saw what was coming and turned to run. But the big dog with its long leaps was upon her in the bat of an eye. In its speed it overran Church. Its size and momentum bowled her over. It turned. As Church was rolling toward it the big dog snapped her on the foot, leg, or somewhere. She screamed to the heavens, a high-pitched doleful cry. I laughed until I almost choked. I am not a sadistic person. I absolutely abhor suffering and pain of any living thing but this was

such an irresistibly funny scene, the big dog knocking Church over and catching and wounding her on the rebound. My risibilities simply submerged my compassions.

Church made it up on the porch. She was crying and limping with one front paw up in the air. Mary heard. She rushed to the porch, asking what the matter was. Still laughing, I could not contain myself to tell her. She stooped and patted Churchill. I was soundly berated for my cruelty.

TALE 98

Hopewell is a very beautiful little town in Mercer County. It is lodged in a valley.

North of it are the Sourland Mountains. These do not soar to any towering heights whose crests would be beyond the vision of an onlooker. Nothing about them posed any forbidding challenge for the adventurous mountain climber. Indeed, one can imagine that morning in the eons and eons ago, when the inscrutable energies decided to create the earth, pushing up tons of rock and soil here and there until their topmost ranges kissed the clouds, and scooping out canyons hither and yon whose depths sat on the roofs of hell; and then became tired and stopped work after breakfast. Had they stayed on the job and done a full eight-hour day's work, the Sourland Mountains might easily have become the Rockies, the Andes, or even the Himalayas. Toward the south was a gradual ascent of perhaps 200 or 300 feet, then a plateau thick with patches of trees, between which were acres of fertile farm land.

I am a walker.

For the walker, there is no place on this whole globe to excel Hopewell as a starting point to get all the rich pleasures of a countryside.

To get the last full ounce of the joy of walking one must carry a stick. This must not be a weapon for defense, nor must it be a crutch for one to lean on if he becomes weary. I had several sticks. They were ash, birch, hazelnut, oak. Nothing fancy, just a nondescript lot which I had picked up at odd times at odd places.

Year after year, Mom kept them under the back porch for me with the stern warning to all, "Them's Bill's walking sticks. Don't nobody bother them."

I had one favorite. It was white pine. It was light and just fitted the grip of my hand. Unlike the rest, it was square, having gone through a planing mill. It was an inch and a half or two

inches across. In length it came up to the bottom of my ribs. In it was a chemistry which always both puzzled and fascinated me. As I walked I had learned to synchronize it; touching the ground with it on alternating steps. On contact with the cement sidewalk or highway, it had a resilience which caused it to bounce, and also, to give off a musical "ping" like that of a tennis racquet when it strikes a ball in dead center.

If one is to get the real joys of walking, the very last thing he must think of is comfort. Nor must he try to order the weather to be just to his liking. I always become more than a little peeved at people who stupidly ask, "How can you walk out in that hot sun?" or "Doesn't the humidity kill you?"

"No."

I am not debilitated by the hot sun, nor do I wilt under the humidity. Any temperature one millionth of a degree under 90 is just right for me. I do not have sweat on my brow; nor are my buttocks wet with perspiration streaming down my back.

A second warning:

If one is to experience the genuine ecstasy of a walk, he must not start out to walk with a plan. Nor must time be a consideration. If he must always be taking a peek at the watch on his wrist, he should have stayed home in the first place. To make a walk an experience of exhilaration, time should stop in the universe.

One should just amble along, saunter, shuffle from one side of the road to the other, stop, look around, and see all the wonders which God has wrought.

Nor should there be anything on his mind. Walking is a recreation, a delectable unmatched recreation.

If one takes a walk to solve problems, then let him kiss goodbye any thoughts of pleasure he is to get out of it. One's mind should be purposeless, but open — a large receptacle into which every impression can be dumped. It must register the almost incalculable swiftness of a hummingbird in flight; pick up the delicate alluring aroma of a hidden wildflower; allow the faintest sound coming from you-know-not-where to ride in clear.

See to it before you start that there's no wax in your ears to impede the myriads of mysterious sounds that will flow in upon you. The heart must be sound, quiet, capable to withstand the shock of your happening on a circumstance of sudden and unanticipated danger.

I had the luxurious choice of walking in any direction I pleased

from Mom's house, knowing full well that wherever I went around the countryside, I should be richly and exorbitantly rewarded in pleasure.

Sometimes before starting out, I would permit myself the trivial annoyances of trying to decide in which direction I would go. At all such moments, I was always tempted to revert to an experience of my boyhood for a decision.

In Newport News, kids played ball in any nearby open field. Always there was a clump of high weeds somewhere near the field. Always in the game, some kid with a high batting average would clout the ball and off it would go out of every player's reach, hell-bent for the clump of high weeds.

The game stopped. Everyone rushed to the spot to find the ball. We went to the place where the ball was last seen. Here the search began. We had no divining rod, no Geiger counter, no radar. But we had our own method of search as infallible as any of the most sophisticated instruments invented by man. Here is how it worked: A boy would be selected. He was told to open his left hand. Then he pressed his fingers together, as tight as he could get them, thus forming a cup or well in the palm of his hand. He then let go a gob of spit in his hand. With the forefinger of his right hand, he pounded the spittle as hard as he could. Out flew gobs of saliva. Whichever way the largest gob went, that was the direction in which the ball lay.

More often than not it worked. Superstition or not, this was a fact of life for us.

Of course, as a man, I could not now go through this unsanitary ritual.

This morning I started out. I walked west on Broad Street until I came to Crusher Road at the end of town. Now the ineffable and glorious joys of my walk would begin to push in upon me in such volume and variety that I would not be able to absorb them all.

This unpaved, trap rock-covered road ran in a crescent shape. On it were but a few houses. The woodlands with all the mysteries and miracles they held would be mine alone. I could burst into song or whistle and listen to the sounds as they rattled against the tall arrow-straight poplars and pines deep in the forests.

I would see a praying mantis, its lower jaw chomping down in piston-like fashion on a heart-shaped leaf of green brier vine; two land terrapins going through amorous motions, necking with a passion that would make a girl and her boyfriend at a drive-in movie look like amateurs in the art of love-making; a mare, startled

by the scent of a strange human, raising her head from her grazing, her tail straight out, neighing and taking off across the field, her foal at her hindquarters; a pond, perhaps 20 feet below the road, on whose murky waters were giant water lily leaves, the shape of an elephant's ear, on which sat bullfrogs and large green frogs, poised to spring to safety in the deep waters at the first inkling of danger; a squirrel leaping down the road, a nut tightly clutched in its mouth, wisely seeking a spot to bury it, thus insuring itself against the menace of hunger when winter came.

I would come upon a row of wild cherry trees, almost black with ripened fruit. Even before I knew, I would stumble into a little cluster of gooseberries on knee-high bushes. An apple tree which had asked no human to plant it, but because nature willed it so, had sprung up, its branches now half-way across the road.

A sickle pear tree, its russet, colored fruit so saccharine that bees and flies were sucking its sweetness. A peach orchard with fruit so soft and rosy, like the cheeks of a baby, causing one to fear to touch it, lest it burst in his hands.

I sampled all of these goodies. I was not stealing, nor did it ever occur to me that I was trespassing on anyone's property. Wherever I found any to my particular liking, I would take some home. My method of transportation was ingenious, simple, my own invention.

I would pull my belt as tight as I could make it. Then opening my shirt, which was now a pouch, I would poke the fruit in all around my waist. If I had fallen down at any angle and squashed the fruit I'd have come up with apple butter, peach jam or pear preserve.

Having walked a mile or two, I came to the end of the road. I was now on top of Mount Rose Hill. From this high point, I could look down and see all of Hopewell in the valley below. Catching my eye above all else was the Catholic church with its white spire, on whose pinnacle was a gold-tinted cross, gleaming in the brilliant sun, shooting up far above the tops of the tallest trees.

Through the branches of the trees, I could see the white frame buildings in which the children of the Catholic orphanage lived.

From this point, Princeton Road ran gradually down into Hopewell.

I started down this road. A car came into my view at the foot of the hill. It was a big car and an old model. It moved at a very moderate pace. Although the sun was shining, its hood did not glisten with newness.

When the vehicle was within a hundred feet or so, I could make out its license plate. It read "Oklahoma."

"What," I asked myself quickly, "would anyone from Oklahoma be doing in this out-of-the-way area in Central New Jersey?"

The car reached me. It was filled with people, at least six, perhaps eight. The windows were down. A man leaned his head out of the front window and said, "Pardon me, Sir, can you tell me where the Lindbergh baby was found along here?"

I was shocked. I recovered quickly. I knew very well the spot where the child is alleged to have been buried. I had passed that path which ran off the road to the burial ground many times.

I said, "If you will go up the hill a hundred feet or so, you will see a path on your right. It is probably covered over with weeds and saplings now. Walk in a distance. There might still be the clearing in that clump of trees where the child is said to have been found."

I walked away in a daze. What are the things which make up human beings? It had been fully five years since this tragedy saddened the world. These people must have known that. Yet here they were, simple people who had traveled 2,000 miles across the country in an old ramshackle automobile to see something that was not there.

You will not think it sacrilege or heresy if I tell you that my mind jumped quickly to that passage in the New Testament which tells of the Three Wise Men from afar in the East who had come in search of the manger in which the new-born Christ child lay.

There must be somewhere in this wide, wide world at least one very, very wise man who can unlock the safe that imprisons the maudlin, the macabre, the morbid, the morose in another man.

TALE 99

A great theatrical production was coming to Springfield. It would be the first showing of "Young Mr. Lincoln." Henry Fonda was the star. The co-star, as I remember, was Ann Sheridan.

Marian Anderson was to be brought on as the special guest star. She would sing, thus adding an artistic musical aura to the performance.

The town was all agog and aglow. It would be the recipient of a double honor. One, a play about its most distinguished son. Two, it had been chosen as the city to see the production first before it went to other cities throughout the world.

The press agent of the producing company came to see me one afternoon about two weeks before the production was to take place. He told me that he had been advised by several sources, none of which he identified, to come and see me, and that he could be assured of whole-hearted cooperation from me. He said, "You know, of course, that Miss Marian Anderson is coming here to be a part of our production of 'Young Mr. Lincoln.' Our company would appreciate it if the colored people would extend to her the courtesies which this great artist deserves."

. I thought this very flattering and highly complimentary, that we should be asked to entertain such a celebrated guest. We sat on the front porch of the building. The press agent looked out on the lawn. "This is quite an attractive place," he remarked.

His appraisal was correct. He looked down upon a lawn extending some 70 or 80 feet before him; 40 or 50 feet in width, with a walk of white stone beginning at the sidewalk and coming up to the steps of the porch. The grass was green, very uniformly green. On each side of the walk were two lilac trees, now in full deep purple color, emitting an aroma so powerful and fragrant that we could smell it in a whiff of wind from our seats on the porch. Around the borders of the porch on one side were fleurs-de-lys, now limp and faded. They were old, so old that the roots had popped up out of the ground and now ran along in knots on its surface. On the other side, violets were in profuse bloom. Bordering the lawn at a height of about five feet was what people there called Osage hedge. It was very thick, with a heavy shiny leaf, beautiful when trimmed. Vines of ivy, morning glories, and another vine with small pink flowers, the name of which I never knew, ran all through it.

Across the driveway from the lawn were trees, maple, poplar, an apple which bore the sweetest red fruit, a sickle pear, and several mulberry. The house of gray brick, which stood on seven acres of land all owned by the Urban League, had a heritage of distinction. It had been built in the 1840s by the then mayor of Springfield, who was a doctor who had come west from Pennsylvania. This mayor had daughters, and there could still be heard from some very elderly persons tales of the good times this mayor threw for his daughters and the elite of the day.

While there is nothing to prove it, the speculation that young Abraham Lincoln was among those present at some of the parties in this house is not such a wild one.

The press agent said, "You could have a beautiful lawn party

for Miss Anderson here.”

To this I assented.

“Now,” he said, “I want to ask you something. We are bringing in the performers the night before the showing. Is there a nice colored family with whom Miss Anderson could stay?”

At this I was taken aback.

“Where,” I asked, “are Mr. Fonda and Miss Sheridan staying?”

“At the hotel.”

There were two hotels of rating, the Leland and the Abraham Lincoln.

“Miss Anderson,” I said, “is an artist of greater renown than either Mr. Fonda or Miss Sheridan. Why don’t you arrange for her at the hotel?”

“Mr. Ashby, it burns me up to have to bow to their practices, but the truth of it is, they won’t accept Miss Anderson.”

“Well,” I replied, “I certainly am not going to humiliate Miss Anderson by giving a segregated party for her, or putting her in a segregated home, thus providing an escape for the discrimination to which you have bowed in the hotels. You can count me out of all your arrangements.”

When it was learned that Miss Anderson would not be accommodated at the hotels, dozens of prominent white citizens called me, offering to welcome Miss Anderson in their homes. Two finely dressed couples came to the office and pleaded with me to extend to Miss Anderson their hospitality.

I told them that I knew nothing of the plans and advised that they call the manager of the theater for information.

Miss Anderson did not come to Springfield until the afternoon of the performance. She was taken to the home of Mrs. R. A. Byrd, a cultured and very attractive colored lady.

The artist had time only to rest a short while, dress, and then to the theater.

We heard that she was deeply crushed to be brought to Springfield to be in a play about Abraham Lincoln, in a theater named Abraham Lincoln, in the home town of Abraham Lincoln – and to be excluded from its hotels.

TALE 100

It was vacation time, the second day of August. I was on my way to Hopewell to see Mom and be with Mary and Kathryn.

They always went to Hopewell as soon as Kathryn’s school term ended at the university. I enjoyed Hopewell. For Kathryn

there was nothing in all the world like spending a vacation with "Gram."

With Hopewell as a base, we could make occasional trips to the seashore, Asbury Park and Atlantic City. If funds permitted, we could see a few shows in New York. Of course, we always visited friends in Newark.

I had left Columbus, Ohio, early that morning. Traveling on Route 40, I was driving a Model A Ford. Without my equivocation, I proclaim to all the world that this was the best motor car ever built by the hands of man.

I purchased it as a used car. For three years I kept it. In all of that time, except for gas and oil, its only cost to me was a new fan belt, a new set of spark plugs, and a set of second-hand tires. I declare that the car could both see and hear. Whenever I was going on a trip, I simply said, "We're going to such-and-such a place today."

The answer was: "Put me on the road and sit tight. I'll get you there safe and sound."

In a moment of mixed humor and respect, I dubbed it "The best Ford that ever left Detroit." My salute to it caught on. Whenever I would show up at a conference, my colleagues would jibe, "Here comes Bill in 'The best Ford that ever left Detroit.'"

A sign read "Welcome to Zanesville, City with the Famous 'Y' Bridge."

I had read that sign many times before. I had crossed that bridge several times before, but never had I taken the time out to see what it was that justified such a boast. This time I stopped. Only a degree or two above a numskull in my knowledge of engineering, even I could admire it as a rather odd and interesting piece of work.

There were two small rivers, the Muskingum and the Licking. The stem of the "Y" crossed the Muskingum River, and led to Main Street. One prong went to West Main Street, the other to Linden Avenue.

The land across the bridge on Main Street was flat. But one went only a short distance on the street and the highway before an ascent which went up gradually for perhaps three blocks.

I looked at the distance of the height. At the very top of the hill, there was an object standing in the street.

"These Burma Shave people," I thought to myself, "do the craziest things to sell their products."

As I neared the object, I discovered that it was not a manikin,

but a real man. He stood almost in the center of the street. His right arm was extended horizontally. From the arm, a sign was suspended. The sign read "I am blind."

I swung very wide of him, cautious lest I strike him. At the top of the hill, I stopped. A woman was passing on the street. She called out to me, "Mister, you going to Wheeling?"

"I'm passing through there, yes."

"Will you take this man? He's blind. He wants to get there."

For a number of days before, there had appeared in the newspapers in various parts of the country harrowing articles reporting how motorists had suffered very severe injuries, sometimes even death, at the hands of hitchhikers they innocently picked up.

I was leary. "But then," I thought, "what danger can a blind man pose for me?"

I got out of the car, picked up his suitcase which was on a nearby lawn, and put it in the trunk.

He had a guitar, and a folder made of some stiff material, which seemed to be a carrier for sheet music.

I drove along feeling very noble. Rightly or wrongly, for one fleeting moment I even compared myself with an immortal character in the New Testament, the Good Samaritan. He had picked up a sick man on the side of the road on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. I had picked up a blind man on the side of the road on his way from Zanesville to Wheeling.

For the first few miles, my eyes were frequently levelled on my passenger, ready for any aggressive move that he might make. To arm myself, I had the crank for the car, which I always kept in easy reach on the floor.

My passenger spoke first. "Do you think you'll make Wheeling by 10 o'clock?" he asked.

I looked at my watch. "Yes, I think so."

We went a few miles. I asked, "Why are you going to Wheeling? Do you have relatives there? A job?"

"You see, I'm known all along my route as a blind musician."

"What route?"

"I navigate between East St. Louis and Wheeling, stopping at various towns. I play the taverns. They all know me. I make out pretty good."

"I see."

"But I ain't going back to East St. Louis no more."

"No? Why not?"

"Too many niggers."

Shocked, I bellowed out, "Too many what?"

"Too many niggers," he repeated. "The town is loaded with them. The packers are bringing them up from the South to work in the slaughter houses. Cheap labor, you know."

My anger was without bounds. It jumped through the roof of my head and went up to the sky. I asked myself: "Can it really be that even the blind hate us too? Why don't I shove this blind so-and-so out on this lonely road in the front of a speeding car and watch him be mangled to death?"

I was appalled even at the thought of committing an act of such heinousness.

My heat gradually died. "I cannot do anything so inhuman as that," I thought. "Kill a man? Never! I am a civilized human being. I am a social worker. Everything I have ever been taught, everything I have ever done, binds me to act with utmost humanness to every other human being."

"How long have you been blind?" I asked.

"Since birth."

"Do you know anything about colored people?"

"Only what white people say."

"What do they say?"

"Oh, they say they are all no good."

"What color do you think niggers are?"

"All black."

"Did you ever see one? You tell me that you have been blind since birth."

"All I know is what they say."

"What color are you?"

"Oh, I'm white."

"Have you ever seen yourself?"

"Didn't I tell you I was born blind?"

"Suppose you touched the face of a colored man and then the face of a white man."

"Yeah?"

"Are you sure you would be able to tell the difference, just touching and no sight?"

"I ain't sure."

Here he did what was to me an amazing thing, for I had never personally seen it before. He drew a watch from his pocket, ran his thumb over it. "It's about 9:30. We ought to be in Wheeling in about half an hour."

We crossed over the Ohio River into Wheeling at precisely 10 o'clock. I pulled close to the curb of the street. I somehow remember it as Market Street. I stopped.

"Have you had a good ride?" I asked.

"Oh, perfect. Thanks so much."

"You sure?"

"Of course."

"No one has molested you? No one has tried to take advantage of your disability?"

"Oh, no, Sir. It's been wonderful, just wonderful."

I got out of the car, went to the trunk and took out his suitcase.

I handed it to him. "I am a Negro," I said.

TALE 101

"He Shaved Lincoln." That was the caption of an article I did about a Negro barber in Springfield. He was a loud-talking, boastful, flamboyant fellow. But he knew his craft, and was without the slightest modesty in proclaiming his tonsorial skill to all and sundry.

He had a shop on the west side of the square. His was the only such shop in town. The leading citizens were his customers. It is certain that he shaved Lincoln after the future president decided to abandon his whiskers for a clean face.

Governor Henry Horner, an avid and discriminating collector of Lincolnana, learned of the article. He requested a copy of it.

I do not have to say that such a request raised in me at least a modicum of just pride. I hastened to send it to him.

It is now, so far as I know, in his collection of Lincolnana in the Centennial Building in Springfield.

TALE 102

Mrs. Kate Arnold, my mother-in-law, passed away. Her demise was sudden, but not unexpected. In her illness, her agony had been intense. Fortunately, her sickness was not a prolonged one.

"Mrs. Arnold," so-called with great affection by young and old in Hopewell, was a person with many of the noblest and finest qualities to be found in any human. Very beautiful when young, she still retained a remarkable amount of that beauty at 39 when her husband, Paul, died, leaving her with five children. My wife, Mary, was the second oldest.

Many suitors came to court her. But the always gripping fear

that any "new man" would be mean to her children caused her to rebuff — sometimes not too politely — all of them.

Of course, this threw upon her the ominous and onerous responsibility of rearing these children. But it was a challenge toward which she went forward on the offensive, confident that she could meet and conquer it.

She was the cook at Sheriff Corcoran's Hopewell House, an old and very favorably known hostelry in Mercer County. But her thrift and ingenuity were most clearly demonstrated in her own home. She raised chickens, sometimes as many as eight or 10 dozen in the barn and chicken yard. Always there were fresh eggs for breakfast, and sometimes, if the hens were laying prolifically, there were a dozen or so that she could take to the market for cash. To her, fowl were more than just fowl; they were people, or almost people. Each grown one had a name. By its name it was called, and it responded when spoken to.

There was one, an enormous Rhode Island red rooster, as beautiful and stately a fowl as ever ate corn. Mom named him "Billy." He possessed traits that were startlingly similar to those sometimes displayed in human beings. Billy was really "cock-of-the-walk" in the chicken yard. A hen dare not even cackle without first obtaining Billy's permission. Billy was downright savage if his reign was challenged. He would fly at a challenger, his outstretched sharp spurs set to lacerate him, or pounce upon him, pecking his craw until blood flowed. Then he would strut away, gurgling in triumph.

Of Mom alone did he show fear. A duel between them was worth the price of a ringside seat. If she hollered at him, he would quarrel back at her.

In some way — no one could ever find out how — Billy would sometimes get out of the well-wired chicken yard. Freed, he would come strutting up the path to the house, talking loudly to himself. Mom would hear him and holler out: "Billy! Billy! What you doing out of that yard? Now you get right back in there, you hear me?" He went back, but he "sassed" her all the way to the wire. The rooster was smart enough to get out of the yard but too dumb to find his way back in. He would still be fussing at Mom when she opened the gate and chased him in.

Mom displayed her thrift in another way. She raised a hog, so that there would always be meat. At a certain time in the spring, she purchased a shoat, so that when fattened, it would weigh about 200 pounds at killing time just before Christmas. One part

of the hog she and I never had to share with the rest of the family. It was the "chitterlings." Born in Virginia, as was I, she knew the choicest part of the pig. We always had our chitterling breakfast with spoonbread and her own chili sauce or pepper-hash early Christmas morning before her Jersey-born children were up to close their noses and tell Mom to take that stinking stuff out of the house.

It became apparent that Mary's mother's illness would last for some time. She had to take over for her sister, Allena, who was a beauty culturist and operated a very successful beauty parlor.

It was at midnight that Mary telephoned me and told me of Mom's death. I left for Hopewell early the next morning.

I was to go to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, to pick up Kathryn, who was then employed as an assistant to Dr. Charles S. Johnson, the president of the university.

I was making great time in my little blue Studebaker. I had passed through Effingham, a town in southeastern Illinois, and gone perhaps 15 miles, when I was alarmed by a menacing "bonk-bonk-bonk" in front of the car. It stopped. Absolutely ignorant about any phase of motor mechanics, there I stood helpless and scared to death on an unknown road in the midst of what looked to me to be endless farmland.

I did not wait long before a man drove up. He leaned over and asked what was the matter. I told him that I did not know.

He got out, raised the hood, and bade me start the engine. I did.

There was even a louder "bonk-bonk."

"Looks to me like there's something wrong in your manifold."

"What do I do?" I asked.

"There's a garage at Wheeler, about two miles down the road. I'll push you there."

I told the mechanic my plight. He was very sympathetic and cooperative. "I'll get you on the road as soon as I can."

He discovered the defect almost immediately. The oil filter had clogged. No lubrication was going through to vital parts of the car.

In about two hours, I would guess, I was off winging again. I made Evansville, Indiana, by nightfall. I had no trouble finding lodgings. Luckily I knew a Miss Williams, a teacher in the city schools. She directed me to a family who gave me a lovely hot meal and a very comfortable bed for the night.

Kathryn was ready and waiting for me when I reached her just before noon the next day. We decided that we would go as far as

possible by night. It was, as I recall it, about 7 o'clock when we reached Bristol, Virginia. I first looked for a place where we could stay for the night. Then something to eat. We were told of a restaurant on a side street downtown. It was owned by a Greek. It was dimly lit and filthy. One man sat at the counter. It was a real "greasy spoon." The food was abominable.

Our rooms too, were terrible. I was afraid that one quilt on Kathryn would not keep her warm, so I spread over her also my overcoat. I got no rest that night. I could account for my insomnia. One reason was that I was on edge about starting early the next morning. The other, and far more important, was that I kept listening for Kathryn, poised to jump up at the least noise from her.

I had sought and received very detailed instructions on how to get through the town and on the highway the next morning. Thus, when we started at just about daybreak, I had no qualms about getting lost.

A bit of good fortune fell to us. In the center of the town, on a main street, a sudden blast of a siren went off behind me. I slowed to a halt. A car shot by me and stopped.

A man stepped out of the car. I recognized his uniform as that of some official.

He came to me. "Mornin'. Where y'all goin'?" he asked.

He was a state policeman. He had seen my Illinois license and knew that we were strangers.

I told him our destination. He said, "Foller me." He took us through the town to the beginning of the highway. "This here is the Shenandoah Valley Trail. Stay on here, hear what I say. Stay on here. Don't git off nowhere, and she'll take you straight on up North where you want to go."

The sun was very bright and now beginning to be quite warm.

At almost 8 o'clock I said, "You must be getting hungry, Kid. We'll stop for breakfast at the first diner we come to." Very shortly we spotted a sign on the side of the highway which read "Pine Log Diner — two miles ahead."

The building was an attractive one on the outside. It was pine, alternating boards that had been stripped of their bark, others with the bark still on.

We went into the dining room. No one was in it. We took seats at a table near the wall.

A young woman came in from the rear of the room. She took one look at us. "Y'all cain't set there. Git up and go out that door

around the back to the kitchen. A nigger woman will give you somethin' to eat."

By now I knew color hate in every face that it had ever worn, its breadths, its depths. I hated it. I had never accepted it. But I had learned that I must live with it. Little satisfaction came to my emotions when under my breath I cursed the individual who wounded my feelings.

I had grown callous, hardened. I took it because I had to. But I always hoped that it would never happen to Kathryn. I did everything I could to shield her from bitter experiences which I now took as commonplace.

But now my hopes died; my illusions shattered to bits. Here was the stark reality. Here was a fact of life. I looked at her. Her upper lip quivered. She would break into tears. She did not. She was too brave, too understanding. There was no point in showing resentment to the young woman. What could we do? We were hungry. We went to the kitchen.

I shall, I am quite sure, live to be an old, a very, very old man.

It is possible that when the weight of years are upon me, so that my now erect shoulders stoop, I may become philosophical, cynical, a hater of mankind, white mankind. If that day ever comes, I shall know exactly the womb in which that hate was conceived and the precise moment of its conception.

It was when that young woman with brown hair and brown eyes said to us: "Y'all cain't set there. Git up and go out that door around the back to the kitchen. A nigger woman will give you somethin' to eat."

These words crushed the soul of my Kathryn.

TALE 103

A thermometer over the doorway of a shop registered 84 degrees.

I was driving up Fifth Avenue to Harlem, en route to see a friend who lived on West 141st Street. I was enjoying myself immensely in a game – namely, seeing how many blocks I could go on the green lights before I must come to a halt by the flash of red.

I was amazed at my skill in synchronizing the speed of my motor with that of the alternating green and red lights.

The red came on at 48th Street. I stopped at the head of the line.

My eyes were directed to a police officer on the southwest

corner of the avenue.

The green light flashed on before I was aware. I looked. Clouds of steam were swirling up in the front of the car. I did not move.

"My God," I exclaimed, "my radiator is boiling over."

Motorists behind me cursed me. "Move on! Get out of the street!"

Horns honked. It sounded as if all the Gabriels in the world had gathered in that one spot behind me and were blowing their trumpets at me.

I jumped out and leaped to the front, preparing to raise the hood.

The policeman walked to me. "Move on! Move on! What are you doing, blocking the traffic?"

"My radiator is overheated," I shot at him.

"Show me your license."

"What has that got to do with my radiator?" I demanded half angrily. I showed the license.

"Don't they learn you nothin' about a car out there in Chicago before they let you drive?" he asked.

"Look, officer, my radiator — —"

"Ain't nothing' the matter with your radiator, feller. You're standing' over a manhole. The steam is comin' from the sewer."

How dumb I was! I felt so low that even a worm would have seemed the size of the Empire State Building beside me.

I wheeled the car into 48th Street, and sped across town to Lexington Avenue, always looking back to be prepared against some wise guy who would speed by and jibe, "Hey, hayseed! Take that jalopy back to the hog-and-heifer cornbelt."

TALE 104

I wrote a play entitled "Booker T. Washington." It was produced by the Rose McClendon Players Workshop at the New York Public Library's 124th Street Branch. It was also done during "Negro Week" at the 1939-40 World's Fair.

Two stars came out of that cast: Ossie Davis, star of stage, screen, radio, television, and a playwright. He is also a tireless and indefatigable worker for civil rights.

Also in the cast was Frederick O'Neal, star of stage, screen, radio, television. He has been the president of Actors Equity.

TALE 105

"The Road to Damascus." This was a play I did on the life of the Apostle Paul. It was published by the Christopher Publishing Co., Boston. I think this company is still in the publishing business.

TALE 106

Kathryn died. God came and took her. I am sure that it was God Himself. He would never have entrusted the pilgrimage to His Mansions in the Sky to anyone of less power, mercy, majesty — not even to his chief archangel.

In a moment of anger and resentment, I started to demand of God why He had done this. Then I remembered that I had never bothered to learn too much about God. He could turn on me, and in all fairness and justice, chastise me and say: "You never bothered to learn about Me. What, then, gives you the right to demand of Me that I explain My actions to you?"

Except for Jesus Christ, there has never lived on this earth a soul nobler, kinder, sweeter, than that which was encased in the body of Kathryn.

TALE 107

I moved to Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1944. A year later young men, doffing their military uniforms, were returning home by the thousands. It seemed that everyone had a wife and a baby, and no place to live. It was not unusual to be accosted on the street by a young woman, perhaps scarcely out of her teens, carrying her baby tightly in her arms, or pushing it in a carriage, who would run up to you and ask unabashedly: "Please, Mister, do you know where I can get three rooms? I'll even take two." They never asked about a house, knowing that was impossible.

The city officials made sincere and persistent efforts to get more living space for the veterans returning from World War II. The Elizabeth Housing Authority petitioned the War Department to allot to it some of the quonset huts and also some of the prefabricated houses used as barracks in the camps. Fortunately, its petition was approved. Quonset huts and prefabricated houses arrived and were set up. The director of the Elizabeth Housing Authority, Arthur Long, was empowered with the responsibility of selecting the families who could occupy the apartments.

Not a single Negro veteran was assigned to a house.

As the executive director of the Urban League of Eastern

Union County, I went to see Mr. Long to learn on what basis he made his selections. I complained vociferously to him about his one-sided decisions.

He quickly worked out for himself a set of excuses which were very shallow and plainly discriminatory. He did not want Negroes living side-by-side with whites in these projects.

J. Leroy Jordan was a Negro attorney in Elizabeth, a rather successful and influential one. He had been in World War I, where he had risen to first lieutenant. He was now commander of the Colonel Young Post 134, American Legion, whose membership was entirely Negro. The post was large and it was effective in swaying decisions about the city's life.

I went to see Attorney Jordan and told him of the situation. He was puzzled and immediately responsive. He asked what could be done. I suggested that the Colonel Young Post ought to take a firm and resolute stand demanding that Negro veterans share in apportionment of all available space in veterans' housing. I further advised that he call a meeting of the post to make all actions legal by presenting a united front.

The meeting was called. It was held in the community hall of Pioneer Homes. The response to the call was tremendous. So great was the attendance that the room hardly held all comfortably.

There was violent anger when I stated the situation. The most extreme were against any resolution or words of any kind.

"Let's go and get Long," they cried out.

Attorney Jordan was able to restore calm. Their actions took the following form: There was a resolution condemning the discriminatory practices of the Elizabeth Housing Authority and Long.

They demanded that Long assign Negro veterans to apartments in some of the houses, within 72 hours, or the Colonel Young Post would take the following steps:

- (1) Acquaint the War Department with what was going on;
- (2) Acquaint the Veterans Administration with what was going on;
- (3) Release a copy of its action to the Elizabeth Daily Journal for publication. They asked me to prepare the letter on the post's stationery, and the commander and all the officers signed it.

The afternoon after Mr. Long had received the letter, he telephoned me and asked me to come to his office immediately.

The man was obviously worried. Everything in his face and manner patently revealed his anxiety. He seemed to be asking me

to commiserate with him as he told me how he was being berated by some veterans as showing favoritism because there were no apartments for them. Then he said, "And this morning I received a threatening letter from Leroy Jordan."

He pulled a drawer in his desk, reached in, took out a letter, thrust it in my hand, and said, "Read this."

I will never know how I successfully portrayed ignorance of the letter as I read it, he sitting next to me and watching my every move.

He said: "We are now erecting a new project over by Williams Field by the Edison Vocational and Technical School. It ought to be ready in a month or six weeks. You select and submit to me a half-dozen or so families of your people. I'll allot them apartments in that project."

I laughed like hell when I got out on the street. This harassed man had passed to me to read the letter which I had written with Jordan's signature. Some white people are so gullible. Some white people are so dumb.

Oh, the lies, tricks, and chicaneries to which Negroes must resort to get even a smidgen of justice!

TALE 108

Winthrop Rockefeller was a member of the board of directors of the National Urban League. He was a good board member. He attended meetings of the board faithfully. Of the many weighty and complex problems which always crowded the agenda of each meeting, he was always part.

We always knew that he would attend the annual conference of the National Urban League. At one time his presence might be for only a morning or an afternoon session. At another time he could be seen moving purposefully about from one conference room to another for the entire length of the annual meeting.

The annual conference of the League was held at Camp Atwater. This camp is located on the shores of a lake near Springfield, Mass. It is a body of very clear water of considerable size. In the middle of it is an island. One of the challenges for the camp was to swim from the mainland to the island, touch it, and return to the mainland without stopping to rest.

Alexander J. (Joe) Allen, the director of the Urban League of Baltimore, performed the feat without even so much as a deep breath. No one else possessed such aquatic excellence. There was no other place in the entire United States like Camp Atwater. It

was the place where upper-class Negroes sent their daughters. Mothers took delight in the snobbishness which permitted them to boast, "My daughter spent two weeks at Camp Atwater." If perchance a girl was at Atwater for the entire camp period, her mother was elevated to a perch in Negro society, the height of which no instrument could measure.

Camp Atwater was a beautiful place. It had all the features of the expensive and exclusive camps, in which only the children of the wealthy could enroll.

It is now the 1940s. The National Urban League had branches in about 40 cities throughout the country.

Attending the conference this year were members of the staffs of the various branches, as well as many delegates. Mr. Rockefeller was most courteous and democratic. It was a genuine civility. He wanted to emasculate even the tiniest vestige of class or racial difference between us. To achieve that end, he did not attack snobbery or color bias with a frontal onslaught. That would have been too obvious, too self-defeating. In a most unobtrusive manner, he permitted the word to get about that he would not be offended if we addressed him as "Winnie," the appellation used by his friends in the circle in which he traveled. I have never doubted his sincerity about this, but did he really know what he was asking? We still lived in a half-free, half-slave society. We were poor. We had no educated class. He was inviting us to leap over all three centuries of being half-men and half-women and become his equal in one jump. Of course it could not be. No individual ever could, nor shall there ever be one who can, throw off the degradation of centuries of oppression and become fully free overnight.

We had great admiration for Mr. Rockefeller for wanting to be "one of us," but of course, it was a predicament that would make us uncomfortable. There was one exception, Lester B. Granger, the director of the National Urban League, and he exchanged greetings with all others on a first-name basis.

This was a unique period for Negroes in this country. In mind, body and soul they became starkly aware that they were feeling something which was entirely new, or if not new, certainly with a driving and reckless force. They said: "I'm tired of all this goddam crap. Tired of hearing the white man say, 'I can't serve no niggers in my restaurant.' Tired of being told, 'I ain't got no place for colored in my hotel.' Why, hell, I've been to Europe. Hitler levelled his bullets at me. Missed. I went to the Pacific. Mr. Hirohito sent

his madmen at me to blow me to hell in their planes. I'm still here. Why don't I tell the white man, 'Take your goddam boots off my neck! Get the hell out of my road so that I can pass! I know now how to run around you or jump over you. You'll shoot; you'll shoot to kill, you'll say. What the hell do you think I care? I'll only be dead. Hitler's bullets missed. I stood in the path of fire from the mad dive of the Kamikaze. They missed. Would I be any deader from your bullets than I would have been from one of Hitler's or Hirohito's?' "

As we shouted our defiances against the federal government, it sat on its rump and watched us flogged, burned, murdered by armies of the Ku Klux Klan, who claimed congressmen and governors in its fold. We knew that we must scream out against injustice. We knew then that we were not so afraid.

Could it have been that without knowing it, we were putting together the logistics of the "March on Washington"? Could it have been that quite ignorantly, we were outlining our ears to listen to the only immortal line uttered by the tongue of man in the 20th century – Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream"?

With all torches burning, we lit into the labor movement. We set our fire to it in the sleaziest, vilest, nastiest, earthiest words, the kinds that pimps and whores say to other pimps and whores. Plumbers, boilermakers, electricians, machinists, sheetmetal workers all had clauses in their constitutions that barred Negroes as members. We condemned to hell John L. Lewis, the high priest of the American labor movement. His was a great intellect. He could recite a whole scene from a Shakespeare play. He could quote precisely an entire chapter from the New Testament, but how much did he really care for the miserable plight of the Negro worker? How often and at what place did he raise his thunderous voice in condemnation of the discrimination of which he knew we were powerless victims? And Philip Murray, the boss man of the United Steel Workers of America. Sure, he spoke out sometimes. He even attended a conference of the National Urban League. So what? His words were wishy-washy – as effective as a drink of powdered milk. We listened and said "Oh, hell!" But we loved Walter Reuther, the president of the United Automobile Workers. We respected, we believed Walter Reuther. He was young, brash, brainy, bold, brave. When Walter spoke we listened. When Walter spoke, we said, "Speak on it!"

Our sharpest and most venomous darts we bombed against a red-necked, gallus-breeched hillbilly Congressman from Tennessee.

This scurrilous cracker in reckless malevolence tried to pin the opprobrious label of "Communist Front" on the National Urban League. This because the League was a persistent advocate of public housing for poor people, paid for out of the federal treasury. Mr. Rockefeller sat through it all. He saw our flailing arms and wild gestures. He heard the fiery "goddams," "bastards," "sons-a-bitches" as we spouted them from our burning lips. I do not know how much of what he saw and heard pierced his brain or lodged into his emotions. This much I do know: He did not walk out on us. He did not sluff us off.

He was silent. But it was not a "none-of-my-business" silence. Perhaps he thought: "These people are in a fight for decency, justice. They are right. I don't like the way they are going about it, but I cannot deny their purpose. I, too, would fight if I were in their circumstance. I would be less than a man if I manufactured some excuse to get out of the heat of their struggle. We believe in the same things, freedom, justice, equality, and opportunity to work, learn and live decently. I've got to let them know that they can count on me to help make their aims a reality."

The meeting adjourned about 10 o'clock. It was too early for bed, yet in this remote place what could we substitute to fill the time?

Most of the men stayed on. They would just jive and tell lies. As practically all of them had been a part of the military service in one branch or another, it was natural that the tales they told would be military. Mr. Rockefeller told the following story: "I was sitting in the sergeants' barracks waiting to be called to receive my papers for dismissal from the service. The room was somewhat crowded. Questions were being asked, nearly all pertaining to what each fellow would do when he got home. Some would marry, some go on to college, some return to the job they left, and so on.

"I sat silently over in a corner. A rather raucous voice called out, 'Hey, feller, what you going to do?' I did not look up, I did not reply. The voice came stronger the second time.

" 'Me?' I said, looking up.

" 'Yes, you.'

" 'Oh, I guess I'll go into oil!'

" 'And lose your shirt,' gulped my interrogator.

"There was a burst of laughter. The chorus repeated. 'He's going into oil. He'll lose his shirt!'

"I did not tell them that my name was Rockefeller and that I was already deep in oil."

TALE 109

I received a telephone call from the director of employment of Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, asking me if I could confer with him in his office. His name no longer sticks with me. His call to me came as a result of a suggestion to him by Dr. George Maverick, who was an officer in the Standard Oil Company, and who was also a member of the board of directors of the Urban League of Eastern Union County.

Of course I was thrilled. Such a conference held so many potentials.

I had lunch with him in the company dining room. We then went to his office.

"Mr. Ashby," he began, "you know that we are engaged in a war in the South Pacific where we have hundreds of thousands of American boys. Almost as deadly as the enemy's bullets are the annoyances which our men must suffer. They find themselves in thick jungles where there are billions of mosquitoes, bugs, gnats, wasps, ants, poisonous flies, lizards and snakes. These pests are always in vicious attack upon them. They cannot sleep at night and the hungry things permit no peace even in the daytime. The military has put upon our company the task of developing a repellent. We feel sure that our research department has now come up with such a product. We call it the aerosol bomb. This liquid must be put into a special can. That operation is done by women in our production department. It is done on a machine which does not require too much skill, and which, I am sure, can easily be learned by anyone who will put herself to the task seriously.

"At present, these machines are going at full tilt, two shifts a day. We shall need many more machines, and indeed an order has been placed for them. The truth, however, is that we cannot get workers to man the machines we now have. At this moment, there are at least five or six without an operator. All of our operators are white women.

"The military is on our backs for more and more production. We are doing the best we can with our present corps of workers.

"Dr. Maverick suggested that we might fill up our labor gap by employing some colored women. What do you think of that?"

"Fine," was my succinct, enthusiastic answer.

"Do you think you can help us?"

"I am sure I can."

As carefully as I knew how, I selected a dozen women, not one of them over 30 years of age. This was a pilot effort. It must

succeed. If it worked out well here, I could then go to recalcitrant and prejudiced employers who were still adamant in their convictions of the inability of Negroes to grasp the intricacy of the operation of a simple machine, and say to them, "See what the Standard Oil has done. Why don't you use Negro labor?"

The women came to my office. I went over in detail everything that I could think of which they might encounter. I advised them how to meet it.

Six were sent for an interview. I felt perfectly sure of their capacity to stick to the job and their ability to learn and master it.

In about three hours, all of them came back to the office.

The looks of dejection upon their faces were more than I could believe. Two of them were almost in tears. They were not hired.

"What happened?" I asked, somewhat flabbergasted myself.

They could not tell me. They could only say that the director wanted to see me, that he would explain everything to me.

I hastened to his office.

He apologized with that ancient bit about how sorry he was but that he could not help it. He said that his white workers all threatened to walk away from their machines if Negroes were brought in.

I pressed him to give me the specific objection which they had made.

He said: "They claimed that they would have to use the same lavatory as the colored women, that all colored women have a foul odor under their arms, that their feet smell, that they are unclean in their persons, that all of them have venereal disease. They added that they would work with them only if we built a separate lavatory for the colored women. That we just can't do now."

I was mad as hell. In a voice far louder than was necessary, I blurted out, "All crap stinks, no matter what color it comes from. The Standard Oil Company is a big company, one of the largest in the country. Are you going to let a little clique of factory workers, some of whom just got off the boat from Ireland or Italy yesterday, determine what the hiring policies of your company should be? You say that our men are suffering more plagues than Moses put on the Egyptians. You say that you have a product that will alleviate their suffering. It would seem to me that out of pure patriotism, these women would want to see production speeded up, so that relief could come as soon as possible. But I speak now neither of patriotism nor prejudice. I only state the fact that I am shocked that this company would let these women tell it whom it

should and whom it should not hire."

There was silence as my words ended.

In a few minutes (I have no idea how long) he said, "Mr. Ashby, I have never heard anything like this before. Come with me."

We left his office and started in the direction of the building where the women were at work. He gave no hint why we were going there. I did observe that the muscles in his face were as taut as a drawn rubber band.

We went into a large room where the machines were spinning and clicking. He ordered the forelady to have the machines stopped.

Without any ceremony whatever, he began: "Girls, this is Mr. Ashby. Mr. Ashby is going to send us some new workers. They will be colored women. Some of you have said you will quit your machines if the company puts colored women at machines alongside you. This is Friday, payday. All of you get your pay at the office tonight. If you don't want to work with colored women, don't come back to your machines Monday morning."

I inquired before noon Monday morning. All came back except one.

TALE 110

Three women came in to see me. One of them I recognized as a power machine operator at the Elizabeth Shoulder Pad Co. They wanted to discuss with me a troubled situation which had suddenly erupted at their factory. It had to do with a raise in wages which had been promised them, but which they had not received. They made a certain type of shoulder pad; to complete it required a certain number of machine stitches. They were paid on a piece-work basis. The boss put in a different type of shoulder pad. To finish the new pad required more stitches and longer running of the machine. They soon discovered that with the additional operation, the number of pads they could turn out in a day was fewer. They asked for a raise to compensate for the difference. This the boss promised them. But their last two pay envelopes showed that he had reneged on his promise.

I told this delegation that their complaint was one that should be taken up with their union; that the program of the Urban League did not encompass any involvement in a wage dispute between management and labor. They were members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. They took their complaint

to the union.

A meeting was called. The operators unrelentingly asserted that they would attend no such meeting unless I was invited to sit in with them.

The meeting took place in the union headquarters, on the second floor of a building on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Elizabeth Avenue. Pete Detlefsen, the business agent; Maria, his secretary; Fred Zahn, president of the Elizabeth Shoulder Pad Co.; about a dozen operators and myself, composed the session. This meeting had all the suspicions, distrust — something closely akin to violent hatred — almost invariably present in disputes between workers and owners. Liars, cheats, bums, lazy louts — these were the kinds of words which flew from one mouth to another.

Mr. Zahn bluntly asserted that the girls refused to work, that they walked out of the factory, and that therefore, it was a strike.

The operators rebutted, shouting that they were at their machines, ready to work, but would not do so until Mr. Zahn agreed to place in their envelopes the pay for the additional operations on each shoulder pad, as promised. They further said that because they would not operate the machines, he chased them from the machines and forced them to get off his property, with the threat of arrest by the police for trespassing.

One of the operators shouted to Detlefsen, "Let Mr. Ashby speak."

In essence I said: "You, Mr. Zahn, said that the girls refused to work and went out of the factory, and that therefore it is a strike. If that is true, you are correct. The operators, on the other hand, claim that they were at their machines, ready to work, but would not do so until you made good on your promise of a wage hike, and because they did not, you forced them from their machines and drove them from the building. If that is so, then it was a lockout and you are responsible for it. But we are getting nowhere. Each is accusing the other. Who is right is of no importance in this dispute. Now I ask you this, Mr. Zahn: Did you promise these operators a raise?"

"Yes."

"Have you made good that promise?"

"No."

"Then that's the point, Mr. Zahn, the only point. I am sure that all of these operators are in a hurry to get to their machines this minute if they can be assured of the raise you promised them."

Mr. Zahn walked over to me. He said: "I have never seen this gentleman before in my life. But what he says is true. Girls, go back to your machines."

I was about to leave when Mr. Zahn said, "Let's go and have a cup of coffee."

We started out, Mr. Detlefsen, Marie, Mr. Zahn and myself. We headed for the Jersey Diner which was a block away. We reached Jersey Street and were about to step off the sidewalk.

Mr. Zahn said: "Wait a minute. I want to tell you something. Pete, you're a Swede and a Protestant. Marie, you're Italian and a Catholic. This gentleman is a colored man. I am a Jew. All different. We had our quarrel, we settled it, and now we go as friends to have a cup of coffee together. Why can't people the world over settle their differences like that?"

TALE 111

Dr. L. Greeley Brown, a member of our board of directors, suggested that the League invite Dr. Ralph Bunche to come to Elizabeth and address a mammoth public meeting. The proposal was accepted with cheering enthusiasm. But how to go about it proved immediately baffling. The names of prominent citizens of wealth and culture, in business or finance, education or religion, were all tossed about as persons who, because of their influence, might induce him to accept an invitation. But we finally gave up on all of these for one reason or another.

Dr. Brown told us that he and Dr. Bunche were brothers in the same fraternity. This mutual acquaintance should provide a line of communication. He was asked if he would extend the invitation in the name of the League. Dr. Bunche regretfully declined, citing the pressure of duties.

I suggested that we not take his action as final. Just by chance I had heard that Dr. Bunche was accepting invitations to appear only at functions that were sponsored by some unit of government — city, state, federal — where the interests of all the people lodged. I revealed my plan for the next effort. I proposed that we request the mayor to call a special meeting of the City Council. At that meeting the Council could pass a resolution to extend an invitation to Dr. Bunche to come as the honored guest of the city. The invitation could be signed by each member of the Council and the mayor, and stamped with the seal of the city.

Dr. Bunche came. It was one of those rare occasions, unique in the life of any city. Goodwill among all the different species of

mankind was the thing that glowed on the face of everyone. Groups of different national and ethnic backgrounds were asked to present a program showing their respective customs, traditions, mores. In their gay and varied costumes, they danced, sang, and played sometimes bizarre-sounding music.

It was held in the Jefferson High School. Hundreds came early, not to be denied a seat. Loudspeakers were installed to give those left outside the opportunity of feeling that they, too, were a part of the great event.

Dr. Bunche's triumph in Israel in 1948-49 was still very alive in the minds of all. Perhaps the greatest enthusiasm—almost worship—was expressed by the hundreds of Jews who were so vital a part of all the ceremony.

Dr. Bunche spoke of the United Nations. The vivid and warm picture he drew of its aims made many believe that men could really live together in peace, and that the day would come when hate among nations and hate among men would be a very difficult commodity to sell.

TALE 112

Continental School, Number 3, would have a new principal when the next school term began. The old principal, having reached retirement level, would step down.

Miss Mabel Holmes was a teacher in the school. She had been there longer than anyone else on the teaching staff. She had acquired a city-wide reputation as an excellent teacher. She held a master's degree in education, a scholastic honor achieved by few teachers in the entire school system, practically no one in the grade schools.

Besides her teaching, she was a strong instrument for good in the community of the school. She was the perennial secretary of the Parent-Teachers Association. As such, she went into the homes of the parents, participated in the collations which invariably followed the business meeting, and sometimes joined them in social games. Miss Mabel Holmes was a Negro, one of the two or three in the entire Elizabeth school system.

I went to see Miss Holmes. I asked her if she would object if I, in the name of the Urban League, petitioned the Board of Education for her appointment as principal of Continental School.

I made it clear to her that we were the protagonists in the case, and that we had not had any urging from her. She agreed.

I wrote the president of the Board of Education, setting forth

in detailed and chronological order the training and experience of Miss Holmes.

When a few days had passed, and I had no response, I went to see him. I am not quite sure of his name, but he was a mortician with a funeral parlor on West Jersey Street. He acknowledged receipt of my letter, but added that his failure to answer was due to the fact that there had been no meeting of the board.

And then he came on with the refrain which any Negro knows better than he knows the first line of *The Lord's Prayer*.

"Yes, we know that Miss Holmes is qualified. But she is a Negro. I don't think that the white people are ready to accept her as the principal of the school to which they send their children. I am sure, too, that white teachers would not want to be taking orders from a Negro principal."

Part of what he said was true. Practically all of the children in the school were white, predominantly Italian, some Germans, fewer Polish.

I took a sheet of paper and typed across the top this line:

Would you vote for Miss Mabel Holmes as principal of School Number 3?

Yes **No**

Name

Address:

With this paper, I went to the district to get the incontestable proof of the mood of the parents of the children about Miss Holmes. The first woman I encountered sort of dampened my hope. All I could make out was: "My husband, he told-a me no sign no paper for nobody."

My third interview was with a woman about 40. Happily for me, she was the president of the Parent-Teachers Association. Not alone did she respect Miss Holmes as a fellow officer, but in addition, as I learned later, there was a close personal relationship between them that went back several years. She read the paper. Then she summoned, "Come with me," and fled down the stairs. About two or three doors away, she called, "Camella! Camella!" A very beautiful woman came, wearing a pink dress of what I suppose was madras cloth, which emphasized rather than blended with the pink in her cheeks under pitch-black hair. In excitement my guide started to talk with her. They slid from Italian to English. Then my guide said, "You tell Camella what you want."

Camella looked at me and said: "Give me that paper. Miss Holmes was my teacher. She now teaches my two kids. You want

names. We'll get them. Sure, Miss Holmes should be our principal."

In a few days they came to my office with the signatures. There were almost 200 names. Every street in the school district had been canvassed. Every name was affirmative. (I have always had some slight reservations about Camella's unanimous success. There lurks somewhere in me the suspicion that if Camella ran into a negative vote, she simply would not let that person put her name down.)

I submitted the list to the Board of Education. Our actions spread through the neighborhood. Young men in business, graduates of Continental School, came to me and offered cooperation. They wrote letters and made telephone calls to members of the board.

The Elizabeth Daily Journal now knew what we were attempting to do. An article appeared in its columns.

Miss Mabel Holmes was appointed principal of School Number 3.

The Parent-Teachers Association proposed to me that they give a surprise party for Miss Holmes, and that it take place in the school. They would prepare the food. They would ask former pupils of Miss Holmes to return and be a part of the party. They requested that I write a letter to the superintendent of schools and request the use of the school for the party.

Then a very curious twist occurred. A ruling in the school board was that no school could be used except with the consent of the principal. We had to get the consent of Miss Holmes to have her own surprise party.

The party was lovely. I talked with a couple who had come all the way from Philadelphia. Miss Holmes had taught them 20 years before.

TALE 113

I was weary. I had come to the end of my rope. A thought entered my mind that had never been there before. It occurred to me that all of my life I had worked. I could not remember a moment in my life when I did not have a job. Even before my newspaper route, I had a little job. I cleaned the store for Gus Lucas, a Greek, who had a fruit and vegetable store on the corner of 23rd Street and Jefferson Avenue.

I was tired, dead tired physically. Moreover, for 37 years, my mind and my emotions had been buffeted about from pillar to post as I tried to understand and assuage the hatreds of one man

for another; as I tried to placate the wounds of men for whom justice was just a mockery; as I tried to give inspiration and aspiration to one who has peeped through the murk and seen a star, and set as his goal the reaching of that star.

I had not succeeded. I had made no greater dent on man's inhumanity to man than would show on the armor plate of a battleship if I tried to pierce it with a hammer and a pin. It is too late now. I could not start all over again. And even if I did, what assurance had I that the second go-around would profit any more than the first? I would retire. Economically, I was not prepared to retire. As a social worker, I had earned only enough to live. I could pile up nothing for the day when I would not earn. What would become of me? Well, I did not know.

Judaeo-Christian ethics seems to say that if one has been regardful of his fellows, some power — I do not know who — will see that he shall never want food, raiment, shelter. I had no way of proving this. If this was to be my lot, well and good. If the contrary was true — well, I would just accept it as my destiny. Of all the fools on earth, the biggest one is he whose ego tells him that he can ignore all the imponderables, unknowables, the inevitables, intangibles, in this universe, and shape his own destiny and twist all the mysteries of this earth to suit his own fancy. I'll take what's coming to me, and I won't bow out shaking my fist angrily at whoever or whatever it is who runs things. I called it a day in 1953.

TALE 114

The telephone rang. I picked it up. Said a voice: "Is this Mr. William M. Ashby, 53 Irving St., Newark?"

"Yes."

"This is Sam Zagoria. I'm calling from the office of Senator Clifford P. Case, Washington. The senator wishes to speak to you."

"Hello, Bill. This is Cliff Case."

"Yes, how are you, Senator?"

"Fine, and yourself?"

"Very well, thanks."

"Say, Bill, I have just recommended your name to be a member of the New Jersey State Advisory Committee for the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Don't turn it down. I'm proposing no other name but yours."

TALE 115

A letter came from Mayor Leo P. Carlin, appointing me a member of the Newark Human Rights Commission. He asked that I confirm the appointment by letter. I did, and served several years on the agency.

TALE 116

A civics club invited me to be its luncheon guest. In deference to me, the chairman came to me and asked me if I would lead in the Salute to the Flag. I declined. I did not participate in the singing of the National Anthem.

When the meeting was over, a member of the club came to me and said, "Pardon me, Mr. Ashby, I noticed that you did not salute the flag, nor did you sing the National Anthem."

"That is right," I replied.

"I do not understand. May I ask why?"

"Listen, that salute has in it a line, 'One nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' That is a lie. You know that it is a lie. Now I ask you, what justice did I ever have? The courts of the land are absolutely oblivious to the fact that I am a human being; that I know what justice is; that I too would like to know that I shall share it equally with all other men. Do I have justice if I go for a job; if I want a house to live in; if I need to buy a meal; if I ask for a room in a hotel; if I want to vote?

"The National Anthem has a line, 'Land of the free.' What free? When was I ever free? For 250 years, you kept me an abject slave. For 100 years, I have been only half a man.

"The song 'America' has a line, 'Sweet land of liberty.' Liberty for whom? There are streets in this land on which you do not permit me to walk. There are towns in this land with signs strung up, 'Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you here.'

"You know about these constrictions you put on me. You boast that you set me in my place, that I must always know my place, that I must never get out of my place.

"No, I never spout off that poppycock about the flag. I never sing the National Anthem. I never sing, 'My country, 'tis of thee.' They are all lies — lies, and no one knows it better than you. I have not yet found a way to keep you from persecuting me. But I will not permit you to make me glorify your persecutions by forcing me to lift my voice in song to them."

TALE 117

Mrs. Sylvia Josephson, is, I think, a very lovely person. She is the founder of the Eleanor Roosevelt Workshop on Human Relations, and is also a charter member of the Newark Chapter of the American Association for the United Nations.

I am convinced that she believes in the brotherhood of man and works hard for the realization of that unrealizable ideal.

She once told me that so profound is her compassion for all living things that she always deliberately refused to learn to drive an automobile. She feared lest, in some split second of inadvertence at the wheel, she strike a playing child, or run over a crawling ant, thus snuffing out its life.

For several years we served simultaneously as members of the board of the Newark Human Rights Commission. On occasions I sat next to her.

She has very pretty knees.

TALE 118

On the occasion of my 75th birthday, The Newark Sunday News published this article October 18, 1964. It was picked up by the National Urban League and sent all over the country:

Rights Champion Active at 75

William Ashby Was First N.J. Negro Social Worker

By DOUGLAS ELDRIDGE

After half a century of observing and trying to improve the lot of Negroes in Newark, William M. Ashby is as active—and as optimistic—as ever.

Ashby, who turned 75 last Thursday, has probably spent as much time as anyone in Newark in advancing the cause of racial equality. He was the first full time Negro social worker in the state, and he founded and directed the first Urban League offices in Newark and Elizabeth.

Retired for the last 11 years, he still attends several meetings a week as a member and budget chairman of the Newark Human Rights Commis-

sion, and as a member of Frontiers International and other groups. He also spends much of his time writing plays and novels about Negro life.

A cheerful, straightforward man, Ashby reminisced yesterday about his own experiences and the changes in the city since he first came here to work as a waiter after his graduation from Lincoln University in 1911. Ashby, one of a dozen children of a grain elevator operator in Virginia, had worked his way through college by waiting on tables in Atlantic City.

After two years in Newark, he went to Yale University and obtained a bachelor's degree in social work. He taught

school in Durham, N.C., for a year, and did a study on factory conditions there that attracted the attention of the newly formed National Urban League.

Urban League Bid

While working as a waiter in the Catskills during the summer of 1917, the Urban League invited him to set up its first New Jersey branch—and its sixth in the country—in Newark.

At that time the city's Negro population was barely 15,000. With a few exceptions, Negroes then were confined to the most menial jobs with a few companies, lived in cellars and shacks, and were excluded from hotels and res-

taurants.

Ashby set up shop as The Negro Welfare League of N.J. in Mulberry Street, but within a year he and others raised enough money to buy a four-story building at 58 W. Market St. for the league's headquarters and a residence for single Negro girls.

In the early days, while also working part time for the old U.S. Office of Negro Economics, he spent much of his time finding housing and jobs for young Negroes who were beginning to flock here from southern farms.

Long before many of today's civil rights leaders were born, Ashby was campaigning against slums, and seeking health, recreational and educational facilities for Newark's Negroes.

"If you think Negroes live badly now, you should have seen it then," Ashby recalled. But even then, he said, there was remarkably little hostility between races in Newark, and few whites were completely unyielding opponents of any integration.

Retired in 1953

Ashby retired from the local Urban League in 1927 for brief ventures with a loan company and a weekly newspaper, and then became a case worker in the city's welfare division. In 1932 he became director of the Springfield (Ill.) Urban League, and in 1944 set up the Urban League of Eastern Union County in Elizabeth. He retired in 1953.

During the 1920s he was secretary of the Newark NAACP.

and in 1960-61 he served on the New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Some of his plays have been produced by amateur groups, and recently he finished the first draft of a novel.

Asked what has been the Negro's biggest problem in Newark during the last 50 years, Ashby promptly replied: "Everything is the biggest problem—just being alive and being a Negro is a problem."

On the other hand, he praised the city's long tradition of racial peace. In his view, it is the result of the number and diversity of jobs Newark has provided to Negroes, and the work of human relations groups.

Opposes Quotas

Ashby is a strong opponent of racial quotas, but he endorses all the tactics of the modern civil rights movement. "Everything they've done is all right with me," he declares. "The business of gradualism is as dead as can be. . . and that's the way it ought to be."

He says he is unafraid of any white backlash to the Negro drive. "The rough edges are there, but they'll smooth over," he asserts. "Let's get it over with. . . The whole nation will be happier when we don't have to worry about Negroes any more."

Some conflict is inevitable, he said, but racial problems will ultimately be solved because most people "will want to do the right thing." But much is yet to be done, said Ashby, who noted that this



WILLIAM ASHBY
Still in the Battle

year—after enactment of the civil rights bill—was the first time he felt able to sing the National Anthem with the conviction that this is indeed "the land of the free."

He and his wife, Mrs. Mary Arnold Ashby, a native of Hopewell, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary earlier this year. Their only child, Mrs. Kathryn Durrah, died in 1944 while expecting her first child.

The Ashbys live in a house they have owned for 40 years at 53 Irving St., in the heart of an almost all-white neighborhood. On the Ashby mantelpiece are snapshots of a dozen neighborhood youngsters who have made the Ashby house a second home.

That mantelpiece is one of the best sources of continued optimism for Ashby as he begins his 76th year.

TALE 119

Here is a letter that in some way must be unique. How many people do you know, does anyone know, who are the recipients of a letter from one whom they have neither seen nor heard in 63 years? This letter is from Marian Fleming, the girl who was my rival for honors in our class in public school in Newport News. I last saw her in 1904.

L. Marian Poe
 Attorney and Counselor at Law
 628 25th Street
 Newport News, Virginia

Dear Willie:
 otherwise known as Sonny!

July 2, 1967

This letter has been on my mind since at least 1964 when Arthur (Nat) Jackson gave me an article from The Newark Sunday News dated October 18th. I have wanted to write and bring up old friends and schoolmates. You know you were the smartest in the class, and if you had not moved away I would not have been the valedictorian. From the class of 1904, a precious few remain. Lucille Johnson (now Crump and a widow) was the salutatorian. There was Alonzo Hunter, who died some years ago. I believe that Ernest Potter also passed. My brother Dan finished at Petersburg, then on to Howard, and opened his dental office in Suffolk, Va., then he moved back home and he passed in 1949. Archie, my youngest brother, an M.D. from Howard. He passed in 1935. Then I went from here to Richmond Normal, then to Howard Law School, and received my LL.B. in 1925. Since then, I have been practicing right here at home. Of course, age has slowed me down, but I bear the distinction of being the first Negro woman lawyer in the entire South to be admitted to the bar...

Arthur Jackson is here and now married to the widow of Prof. Palmer (our first high school principal). Nora Walker is still here (married name Winbush).

I read the article about you in Newark Sunday News in 1964. Lottie sent it to Arthur, and Arthur passed it on to me. I was real proud to read of your accomplishments, and noted as the first N.J. Negro social worker.

Now I have in my mind to arrange to have you come home and speak for us. What do you think of it? I am still a loyal worker, on the Trustee Board and the treasurer of the church, after being a Sunday School teacher and a choir member. Let me know if you would like to come and we will get together on arrangements, families, and advertising, etc.

Best regards to you and your family, and see if you can arrange to see Newport News. You will be surprised. Regards to your family, and best wishes for you.

Sincerely
 Marian Fleming Poe

TALE 120

I am frequently asked, I think more in jest than otherwise, what is the formula for my good health and buoyant spirit at my age. My answer is simply a smile. By that smile, I am saying that I do not know. For instance, I do not know enough about the way in which God works — I believe there must be a God of some kind — to say why in the first place he caused me to be born; or what his purpose is in letting me stay alive until I have passed four score and 10 years.

Perhaps some explanation for it may be found in three things in my mental and emotional makeup:

(1) I do not hate anyone. I never use the word in referring to another human being. Does this mean that I love everybody? Certainly not. I know plenty of people whose conduct toward their fellow human beings makes me regard them as “no-good so-and-sos.”

But I do not hate them. I do not even necessarily avoid them. To hate anyone one must generate in himself a degree of mental and emotional animosity. Why should I make myself miserable by always being mad at somebody?

(2) There is no one whom I am better than. On the other hand, there never has been in all the billions of people who have lived, who are now alive, and who will yet be born, anyone who is better than I am.

(3) I like people. I wish them to like me. But I would not do so much as even snap a finger to sycophantically court the good graces of anyone. But I would rather cut off my right arm than consciously cause anyone to dislike me. But if for any reason of which I am unaware, one does not like me, I give neither a good nor bad damn.

So you see, with no hates that I must cherish and keep alive; with no one to be better than, so I avoid the need for status and the silliness of either superiority or inferiority, and having the good will of all that I know, there are only three things which give me concern. They are material things, and really not very important. They are food, shelter, and clothing. I am sure that I shall always have enough of these to satisfy my needs — perhaps even my vanities.

TALE 121

The one great risk of being born is that one will live too damned long. I am sure that I shall outlive Methuselah by a thousand years.

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Ashby, William M., 1889-

Tales without hate

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"There is no one whom I am better than," he (William M. Ashby) writes with characteristic humility. Yet he also admits that "there never has been in all the billions of people who have lived, who are now alive and who will yet be born, anyone who is better than I am." These are the words of a man who has kept a long life in proper perspective, the words of a man unvanquished by racial oppression.

*—from the Introduction
Dr. Clement Alexander Price
Historian, Rutgers University*

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